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# CLEAR WATERS

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SHROPSHIRE, HEREFORD, AND MONMOUTH

GLAMORGAN AND GOWER

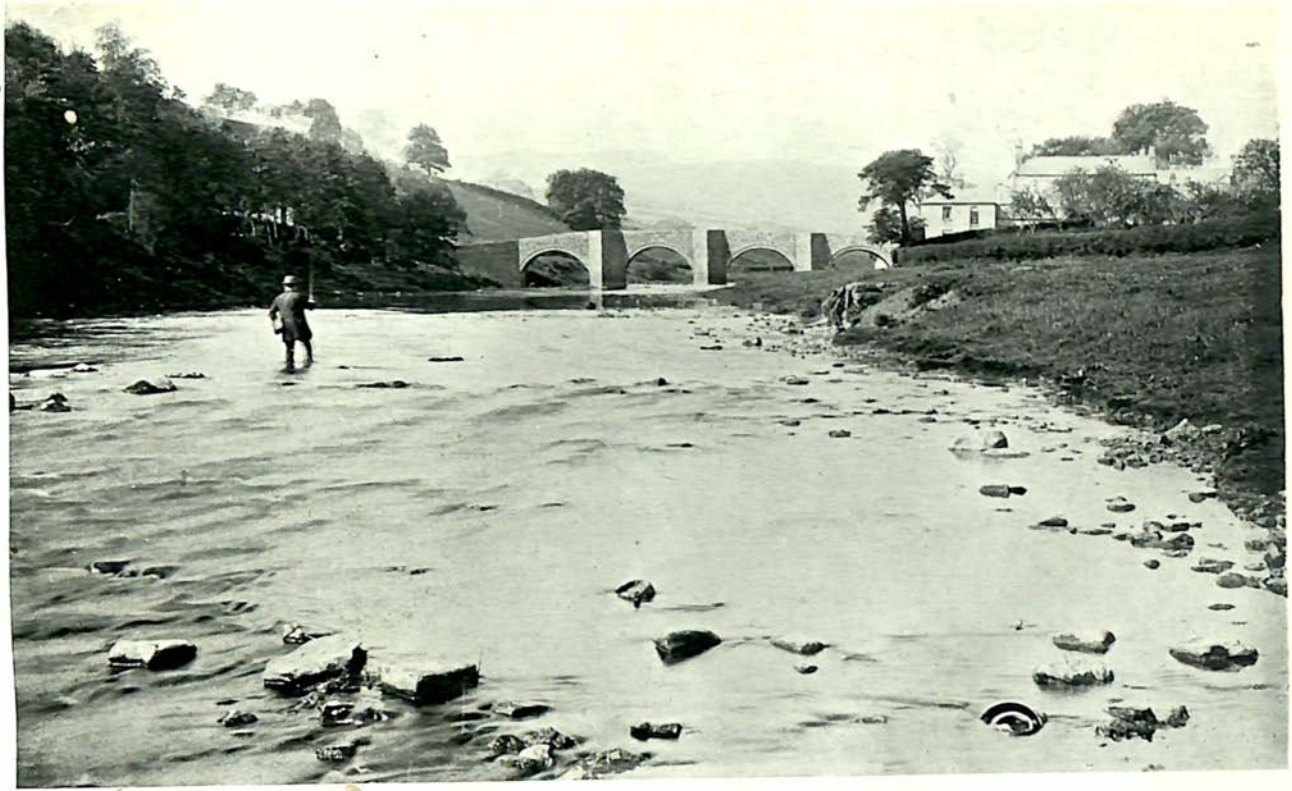
THE GATEWAY OF SCOTLAND

OTHER DAYS

THE MAKING OF CANADA

CANADA IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY

THE FIGHT WITH FRANCE FOR NORTH AMERICA



ON THE COQUET

# CLEAR WATERS

TROUTING DAYS AND TROUTING WAYS
IN WALES, THE WEST COUNTRY, AND
THE SCOTTISH BORDERLAND

BY

A. G. BRADLEY

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# CLEAR WATERS

## I

## THE MICROBE

WHAT is it and whence comes it?

A different insect I think from that which sends the young idea to horse or gun, to bat or ball, constantly as both are found in the same small body. I have myself had most of these other complaints as violently as is common. Childhood and youth are by instinct gregarious. But this angling microbe sends even gregarious youth away into solitudes, where there is no company but his own, no shouting, no competition, no applause, no glory. If it were the unsociable, the studious, the delicate who usually fell a victim there would be nothing in it But as a matter of fact this is not very often the case. It is much more frequently the other sort who in the mysterious magnetism of the stream find a something that is not measured to any extent worth mentioning by success, rivalry, or applause, but nevertheless holds them tight. There are thousands of well-to-do men in this country who are neither good performers, nor really care much about it, yet carry a gun regularly. It is one of the correct things to do, and, what is more, fits in with or sometimes assists their social life, and is

nowadays made very, very easy. The *novus homo* in the country takes it up violently and is thoroughly pleased with himself for so doing, which latter attitude when you come to think of it is rather absurd. Or another sort of man was automatically entered to it as a boy with all the machinery to hand, but without any particular initiative on his own part. Still more, the individuals who hunt because they really like it for itself, no knowledgeable person would ever venture to assert are anything but a minority, while those who really understand the craft are a still smaller one. The accessories of the chase include at least half a dozen distinct attractions, some harmless, others vulnerable and irresistible to the cynic. Even salmon-fishing is not free from suspicion, as it is one of the sports accounted worthy of a millionaire; while a lady of fashion, who with or without the gillie's help has some measure of success, stands more than a good chance of figuring with her biggest fish in the society or illustrated papers, some of which seem almost to exist for such purposes. But trouting profits no one who is not fond of it, and is, I think, really free from all the meretricious enthusiasm and make-believe that hangs on to the skirts of other sports in Great Britain alone, I fancy, of all countries. Not that this is to be deprecated for a moment. The good no doubt far outweighs the humbug, though there is a great deal of both, and it is about trouting and its environment that I propose to gossip in this little book.

How the microbe came to be within me I cannot imagine. My paternal forbears with all their ramifications were scholars or theologians or both. On the

other side they were sportsmen almost to a man, but East Anglians to the core, which in those days, when all but dukes and the like found their sport at home, meant that not one of them probably had ever even seen a trout. As for me the Kennet to be sure washed the far end of our precincts for about two hundred yards. The Kennet, however, was not a prattling brook beside which an urchin would disport himself and make acquaintance with troutlings, but a rather deep and slow river where big trout lay hidden from all but the expert eye, and for most of the summer were buried beneath a coat of flowering weeds upon which the moorhens and dabchicks ran about as on a meadow. No rod of any kind was ever seen waving there, nor was there anything about it to attract an infant or indeed any one but a fairly skilful fisherman, had there been any such, to its rather awkward banks. So I have always held it to be a curious psychological mystery that I, a small boy, absorbed preternaturally for my years in bats and balls of all kinds, who had never consciously heard the word trout uttered, should have been fascinated by a ridiculous cheap print which hung over the fireplace in a certain gardener's lodge. It was an absurd thing. I can recall it most vividly, though I could not have set my infant eyes upon it half a dozen times. It represented two slim gentlemen in tall hats, blue cut-away coats and tight pantaloons standing on a grassy bank, with a long wavy rod resting upon the shoulder of each. On the grass was a creel, and beside it two fish adorned with lurid red spots. In the foreground was a dash of sky-blue water and a bed of reeds bending in the

wind. It was entitled 'Trout-fishing,' and while the nurse gossiped with the gardener's wife my childish gaze was always riveted upon it, though the little room was hung with many other startling works of art. It kindled within me a strange and pleasurable feeling that I can still lucidly recall, though I could not define or analyse it to save my life. It was quite obviously the first stir of the microbe—caught perhaps from some playmate who had fishing ancestors! With the nursery period the few occasions for gazing on this masterpiece passed away as did the very word trout from my ken, and indeed my school holidays were generally spent in the Isle of Wight, the most trout-less bit of England.

And in the meantime the microbe lay dormant. The Kennet below our grounds—though I realised nothing of this till a later day, was netted by a miller at the bottom of the town, who, under a charter of, I believe, Richard II., possessed and still possesses the curious archaic privilege of dragging his net once a year for a long distance, irrespective of any riparian owners' rights. But of this I knew nothing then. A few years later I knew all about it and had more than one wordy passage with the miller's man who, from the withy bed which fronted our meadow, had the impudence to dispute my right to throw a fly from our own ground. It was before the days of dry-fly fishing, here at any rate, and I really think that this upper bit of the Kennet, though quite a sizeable stream, had never before had a fly of any sort cast upon it. There were no local fishermen. It had become a sort of stodgy tradition that the river was

sacred to the net of this unspeakable miller, who sent big fat trout round to his patrons and friends; for at least there was nothing sordid in his otherwise, as I then regarded it, disreputable proceeding. When first the real significance of that two hundred yards, of which one bank was ours, burst upon my awakened senses, I was considerably chilled by our venerable rector, who had once been a fly-fisherman, assuring me that Kennet trout would not rise to the fly above a certain point two miles down stream, and this I think was the local tradition. An utter myth of course, incredible to the modern understanding, and as I very soon satisfied myself by the simplest of methods and a mere wet fly, absurd in itself. But I am pretty sure that no fly at that date had ever been thrown above Marlborough. What between the miller and his mediæval rights and the marquis, whose benignant but still awesome sway then rested on all that country, I don't think it had ever entered into anybody's head, even if they had a stretch of bank from which to cast a line upon that sacred stream. So it was with a shout of amazement and indignation that the miller's man first beheld me exercising what I felt sure were my lawful rights, from our own ground, on waters sacred in his unbelieving and woolly mind to his master and the marquis. I let him shout, and when he had finished assured him with the arrogance of youth and quite justifiable confidence, that he and his master and his beastly net could go to the devil, and that if Richard II. had been unsportsmanlike enough to perpetrate an annual poaching raid on our field and garden among others it was an outrage of which his

master ought to be ashamed to take advantage. As for the marquis, it was a private matter entirely between that great man and myself.

The miller's henchman having listened with dumb amazement to this outburst, departed muttering I should hear more of this. I never did, not likely, save occasionally from that misguided rustic himself. Looking back on it I think it would have been a very nice point of law between the marquis and my insignificant and immature self, had that great man, who possessed some miles of fine fishing down lower upon which in after years I had many a pleasant day, troubled his head about a bow shot's length of water where the fish were not supposed to rise to the fly, and that an outsider could legally net. For our place was on a thirty-years' leasehold under the said marquis, and I used to compose imaginary letters in bed in defence of my practices, which in regard to an ancient superstition were regarded by some as a trifle audacious. My compositions ran something like this, though possibly not so stylish!

My dear Marquis,—The miller is a common enemy though a licensed freebooter. This bit of water is obviously useless to you since you could not fish it without coming into our private grounds, which would be impossible without permission. Reciprodity of treatment of course would be the only possible terms of admission. A mere dog-in-the-manger policy, on the other hand, even within your Lordship's rights on a long leasehold demesne so small that the sporting privileges could hardly have been considered, would

merely deliver more fish into the shameless net of the common enemy, the miller. Ergo, every fish I kill with a fly, besides being a great and worthy pleasure to myself, saves it from an ignominious end in the miller's net.'

Yet, in spite of this crushing logic, there were still people obsessed of a time-honoured unsupported superstition who regarded me as making rather free when for two or three years, till we left the neighbourhood, I treated the water without molestation as my preserve. And this to the oft-times contentment of the household; for Kennet trout, unlike some others from neighbouring chalk streams, are pink and firm and worthy of a dinner-course, not merely to serve as a breakfast side-dish. In a breeze even in our still water they rose fairly to a wet fly.

I even suspected my father, who was on excellent terms with the marquis, of being not without secret misgivings.

But then, though he knew a great deal about many more useful and important things, he knew nothing at all about trout or riparian rights. A letter from him to the great man would no doubt have settled the question in my favour. But this I forbore to suggest, for there was an agent, and even marquises can do nothing without a word at least with their factotum, and I suspected this one of encouraging the prehistoric traditions that a know-nothing community had dumbly acquiesced in. An agent naturally dislikes the concession of small privileges, particularly to a boy. Even then I knew enough to picture him

brushing aside, plausibly and respectfully, his employer's good intentions, and suggesting all manner of possibilities and precedents which such a trifle might give rise to, and finally undertaking to relieve the great man of appearing churlish by answering the letter himself. This he would do most courteously without touching on the question of rights, hinting at imaginary difficulties with imaginary people and pleading expediency, which would have settled the case against me. In other words the great superstition would have triumphed.

However, this stretch of bank, just about the time I ceased to tread it, passed by purchase out of its noble owner's hands, and never I believe since, in forty years, have the three or four successive occupants of our old abiding-place realised that they have as good a little bit of trout-holding water—for till June, when the weeds gripped it, it was always full though a little awkward to fish—as there is on the uppermost Kennet. Nay, worse, one of them not long ago deliberately set to work to fence himself and his successors off from all access to the bank by a thick planting of willows, and King Richard's miller now, I presume, reigns supreme and gets every fish. Indeed, I myself long since ceased to regard that archaic right of his with the frenzy of untutored youth, but on the contrary as a picturesque and interesting survival. I long ago made friends with the successors of my ancient enemy, and not seldom as an occasional visitor to the old place have accepted the hospitality of his little garden behind the mill-house on the island, and cast my fly from it on the wide surging pool beneath the dam where pounders and even two-pounders may be ex-

pected to consider it favourably. There are always two or three sockdolagers of twice that weight occupying the choice positions just under the fall, whence they regard one at quite close range with contemptuous eye. A pleasant leafy spot it is, too, on a June evening, when from the Norman church tower the curfew-bell is tolling; so near and yet so aloof from the dear old town, whose muffled hum floats over the mellow riverside gardens and mingles with the roar of the dam, the rumble of the mill-wheel, and the whispering leaves of the tall poplars overhead.

But all this is anticipating, for we had not got much farther chronologically than the first wriggle of the microbe before the masterpiece in the gardener's lodge. It was some three years before I felt it stir again, and this fell about at Twyford, that most venerable probably of all preparatory schools, which stands, as every Wykhamist knows, in tolerable propinquity to the Itchen. This classic stream, however, had been nothing to me nor to any of us except as the scene of an occasional bathe. The contests of the playground absorbed our outdoor life. But I well remember one June half holiday near the end of my time, how while engaged in a cricket-match I espied one of the masters pass along the end of the playground with a long whippy rod over his shoulder, a creel on his back, and accompanied by a young friend of my own. A voice from a fieldsman somewhere called out, 'Hullo, there 's old Brown going mayfly-fishing.' Then all at once I experienced the same unaccountable attraction and queer, wistful longing that the gardener's print, never thought of since,

had been wont to excite. For some quite inexplicable reason I would almost have sacrificed my chance of the first eleven, for which I was at the moment struggling, to have been in my young friend's place and to have followed that burly figure with the rod and creel to the riverside, though I had but the vaguest notion of his procedure when he got there. Beyond a doubt it was the microbe stirring again. Then there was nothing more till a year or so later, when I ran into a hotbed of the disease and the complaint broke out.

For, to dispense with metaphor, I found myself domiciled in a snug rectory upon the slopes of Exmoor. It was a cold February. I remember the snow lay deep and frozen on the moor, and the stream, of a type different from any I had ever seen, gurgled like a black twisting thread through the white vale below the house. But in due course March suns and balmy winds unthawed the rigid earth, the snow vanished, the valley became greener than any valley I had ever seen in early spring, and there was everywhere a strange and delicious murmur of bubbling and tinkling waters. A mountain rivulet fashioned to a mimic cataract plashed noisily beneath my bedroom window night and day. From the Wiltshire Downs and the Isle of Wight to Exmoor was almost a change of continents to a child. From the typical south to the most extreme type of the west, to an observant impressionable youngster, was almost like crossing the Atlantic to a grown-up. The Exmoor rectory, however, soon became a paradise. Early regrets for the gregarious joys of school life were forgotten. The in-

mates of the house began to talk about trout-fishing as if it were the normal occupation of everybody's leisure hours in the spring-time. Unsuspected rods came out of hidden lairs, and when on an early day a youth of some sixteen summers returned at luncheon time from the river and laid half a dozen quarter-pounders on a plate on the hall table, the insect once again, this time seriously, made demonstrations, and I was soon in a high fever. This was the opportunity no doubt that I had unconsciously been waiting for. The mere sight of these trout, the first I had ever beheld, was enough; and the flies too had, during this first acquaintance with them, an extraordinary fascination. Often in later life have I striven to catch, and with but a faint gleam of success, the glamour which invested the first handling of those palmers, black and red, and these blue-uprights of such ancient fame and usage in the west country.

But a rod! Now almost anything in reason, even a pony, had horseflesh not been abundant on the spot, might have been included in my outfit for this far country, which had been recommended as a cure for some childish weakness. But a fly-rod was outside the vision of my home circle, for the world, be it remembered, has changed much since those days. The parent in Essex, Northamptonshire, or London is almost as likely nowadays to be a fly-fisher of sorts as a home-bred west-country parson. If he is moreover a fond parent too, he thinks nothing of devoting the expanded modern Easter holidays, sensibly and skilfully contrived no doubt by angling pedagogues, without regard to shifting church festivals, to the

education of his hopeful in the gentle art. He takes him to far counties, north or west, and superintends his elementary endeavours. Sometimes I have fancied, on encountering such parties, that the hopeful is rather bored. But never mind so long as he is not put off: the experience will be of infinite comfort and use to him in after life. The parents of former days, though urgent in the matter of ponies, for riding was then a virtual necessity, never dreamed of this other business; we had to look after the superfluities ourselves. Perhaps the rector, himself an all-round sportsman, suggested a probationary period before I communicated to my people the uncanny demand for a fly-rod. We had only three posts a week too, and were eleven miles from anywhere. Nor could he guess that a shrimp of a lad from the dry counties, an 'up-country-man' term of contempt among the local rustics, was likely to fall a hopeless victim to the solitary fascinations of an Exmoor stream.

So for the nonce an expedient was devised in the upper and nether portions of two broken rods spliced together with string. This was my first weapon, and it was about as handy as a shaven bean-stick, while a reel was regarded for the present as a superfluity. My pocket-money was equal to completing the outfit, while old Pulman of Totnes, a name long forgotten, tackle purveyor to the household, supplied me with two casts (collars they called, and still call, them down there) and a dozen flies of the before-mentioned patterns for their equivalent in postage stamps. Our casts were coarser, and our flies, I think, larger, than those used nowadays in that, or

most countries. But revolutions have taken place in fishing as in the greater things of life since those dim and easy-going days. Nevertheless I should still, and do still, when the occasion arises, always mount the same old pattern of red palmer with or without gold twist as a tail fly in clear water up-stream fishing in every stream known to me in Devonshire; further encouraged if such were needed, by the fact that my contemporaries in that country hold stoutly that nothing has ever been contrived worthy to displace it. Strange insects galore have been dressed since those days. Rods, reels, lines have all been developed almost out of recognition. But the old Devon palmer still, I think, defies time and change in its own country, while as for the blue-upright, even if the wings have in a measure been clipped off, who would venture to mount an April cast at any rate without one. After all, the same old naturals, though wonderful names and classifications have been devised for them by moderns sweltering in the weird vocabulary of dry-fly purism, flit and spin through their brief and happy day along the same old stream. Down in the hidden waters between the alders, the rowans, and the oaks, the whir of a feverish world has passed unheeded, and here at any rate time has stood still, and the old, old melodies are played.

I plied my glorified bean-stick with unremitting ardour and with a novel delight, that has never yet palled, in the ever-shifting surface and the strange charms of a hill-born stream purling amid banks that were part wood, part meadow, and part heath. I had never been so happy in my brief and unclouded

existence as in the momentary expectation of killing my first fish, except in the accomplishment of that great design. We had some four miles of water all to ourselves on this river, and my companions, older and comparatively trout-wise, were too intent on their own performances to bother much about me. So I thrashed the stream assiduously by the light of nature through all the leisure hours of daylight with my unhandy weapon for a full three weeks, though cheered and properly startled by an occasional rise (ah! those first flashes of a yellow side above the ripple) before the great moment came, and when it did come it was rather extra glorious.

Now, no knowledgeable angler will need to be told that our trout in such a stream would average about six to the pound. It had been dispiriting to return empty-handed every day to a circle in which your status, it might almost be said, for the warmer six months depended upon your baskets. To say that I can remember the spot out of which that first fish was violently dragged would be ridiculously superfluous, since at this moment, after nearly half a century, I can follow down in fancy that four miles of bewitching water, eddy by eddy, stickle by stickle, and pool by pool. I don't know how that fish took my fly, or why I became suddenly aware that he was engaged in such an artless enterprise, for there was no sign above water. But I did, which proves that I had made some progress. I have more than once in later years seen a small boy engaged with his first trout and how he lets it run about the water shouting in the meanwhile to the attendant parent as to what he was

to do next. I had caught many before I could exercise such composure, if such it can be called. The first hundred at least of mine came flying out willy-nilly. This one was too big to fly, but with the sub-consciousness that one was on I ran backwards in a sort of delirium, and a third-of-a-pounder was whirled sideways on to the meadow, when I instantly fell upon him, and having disengaged the hook went straight home in a rapture. It was almost the largest that had yet been caught that early spring, and the triumph would not brook delay.

I held up my head after that, and for some reason or other very seldom came home again quite empty-handed. The spell was broken. A rod moreover was purchased from Bowden of North Street, Exeter, a maker patronised by the household for a specialty of his, consisting of two whole cane joints and a lance-wood top. I was now admitted as a brother fisherman, and by degrees worthy to join in the long discussions at night over the respective merits of this pool or that stickle and all the rest of it. It may seem ridiculous at such an age, but I cannot help what it may seem, and there are plenty even of skilful fishermen who do not know what such a thing means to their dying day. But the charm of that country, as would have any similar country enjoyed with such freedom through the medium in the first instance of its streams, entered into my very soul. I must no doubt have been rather abnormally susceptible to such influences, and Exmoor with its quiet yet robust life, always in the presence of what to one's youthful imagination were rivers leading into mysterious, unexplored fairy-lands,

or into great moors stretching to infinity, exercised an extraordinary and lifelong influence. Wild horses would not have extracted an admission of such day-dreams even had I been capable of giving expression to this vague sense of continual æsthetic enjoyment. I was frequently rallied for absent-mindedness, a new vice I think, and not being then much enamoured of the literary tasks which imprisoned us for a portion of most days, had no excuse for such mental eccentricities. I was constantly being offered the proverbial copper for my meditations. Had these been capable of articulate shape and the offers been accepted, my seniors would, I think, very often have been properly astonished. It was a wonderful existence in its way for a boy of a sympathetic temperament. There were no lessons in natural history, such would possibly have been regarded as a bore. But simply an atmosphere in which you were supposed to know every ordinary fact connected with earth, sky, or water, and you sucked it all in automatically, out of doors. If a master at school, for instance, during a Sunday walk, had pointed out the difference between a chaffinch and a bullfinch, it might have been thought a little tiresome and very likely forgotten. But here was a circle where to confuse a sea-gull with a curlew, or a pigeon with a hawk on the remote horizon was accounted a disgrace, and to mistake a jack for a full snipe simply wrote you down a hopeless ass or a Cockney. This was admirable. All these and a thousand kindred things were taken as a matter of course, than which there is no better school. They were not holiday interludes, but continued for three hundred days

of the year more or less throughout the changing seasons. Topography and all it signified became in this free, wide-ranging life something real. From the moor just above, where in those days the black game still bred, we could see nearly all over Devonshire and into north Cornwall, together with the whole of the Bristol Channel and the long curving coast of Wales with its shadowy, mysterious, backlying mountains. The habits of observation were established without injunctions or precepts, and they soon extended themselves from the things that were near to the things that were far away. The maps of infancy began to shape themselves into real things of infinite interest, into hills, moors, valleys, and seas.

The greatest joy of all, however, were the occasional days upon the Barle. Our river washed the skirts only of the moor, but the Barle cleft its silent heart. It was a real solitary moorland stream, from where we tapped it near its head four miles away in the gloomy depths of Pinkerry pool, right down to Simmonsbath, peaty and amber-coloured, running from rocky shallows into deep dark pools which seemed to my fevered unsophisticated fancy the potential haunt of whales. In reality they were the stamping-ground of three-ouncers and quarter-pounders and a legion of sprats upon whom a venerable fly-disdaining Triton or two, made raids when they felt hungry.

Sometimes these big ones made a mistake, but it was not generally the proffered fly of the boy that thus deceived them. Occasionally one of our party

at the close of a long day, when the wagonette picked us up at Simmonsbath, had a three-quarter-pounder in his basket to be handled admiringly by envious hands, for some measure of rivalry was inevitable. It is these wild days on the Barle, enjoyed at intervals for several years, that come back to me most readily, and which most certainly had the strongest fascination —dark days when the clouds raced over the bare hills, and the wind whistled in the rushes and bog grasses, and scurried with driving showers up the still tails of the pools. There were never any strange fishermen in those days on the upper Barle. It hadn't been discovered. There was, moreover, a certain eeriness to the very young idea in those long stormy days in the wilds, and an almost fearful joy in following down the grim brown waters through what, at that tender age, seemed quite awe-inspiring solitudes. I well remember, too, the thrill with which I first heard the wild breeding cries of the curlews that came in spring to nest among those lonely hills.

Our own river below the rectory was a joyous silvery stream, overhung with oak, ash, or alder, fringed with steep green irrigated meadows or flat narrow strips of rushy pasture crunched by red bullocks in summer, and in hard winter the frequent haunt of snipe. One discovered, too, even thus early under this system—no, not system, for its natural matter-of-course procedure was its high merit—how much superstition had to do with the assured beliefs of conventional life. One learned that it was quite natural and harmless to walk about in the water even in March and April, if a fly had to be released, or it was

convenient to shift your bank, though a long drive home might be impending. One learned also that to be rained upon heavily for many hours, beyond the passing discomfort which was not to be recognised, was of no consequence whatever. And I see by the official report of the British rainfall that the annual deposit at this particular spot is sixty inches, nearly thrice that of the region from which I write! One learned to regard the neck comforter, so deplorably popular with doting mothers and anxious guardians generally, as an unthinkable effeminacy, and an overcoat as only permissible in a winter railway journey or a long drive in the snow. And the north-western slope of Exmoor was as cold as it was wet. I don't know what our fond mammas would have said if they had suspected the deliberate recklessness of our code; but our guardians seemed to be possessed of some heaven-sent inspiration of how a boy should be dealt with. Nobody ever had a cold. I suppose there was a doctor some dozen miles away, but I have no recollection of his existence. There was incessant shooting, too, in winter, but the weather was not ever, I think, taken into the smallest account unless we were absolutely snowed up, which sometimes happened on Exmoor. I was supposed to be delicate when I went there. It is quite certain that the cure was more effective than any doctors. By the close of the first fishing season I was tolerably handy with small trout, and a curious thing happened in the summer holidays which requires a short preamble.

As my people, according to their usual habit, were to spend it in Switzerland, I was dispatched together

with a pony to some friends of ours in Shropshire, where from childish recollections I anticipated and assuredly found a second paradise. The prospect was faintly clouded, to be sure, by that of a holiday tutor, whose instructions I was to share with the remaining son of the house, then passing from Marlborough to Oxford, and consequently far my senior. Like most of his race he was a mighty Nimrod even then well on in the making, and long afterwards unhappily killed in the hunting-field. He was very kind to me, but hated fishing. So, except for occasional rides when my pony and I were urged to jumping adventures of a kind unprecedented in my modest experience, I saw little of him except at meals and during the tutorial interlude, which was happily limited to a single hour after breakfast. During this weary procedure I remember he always nursed a fox-terrier, and seemed to me to make it bark by some subtle action whenever he was involved in a difficult passage. For myself, I think I looked out of the window most of the time, to where the waters in the park shone invitingly in the morning sun. Our tutor being only an undergraduate was naturally not a disciplinarian, though he became afterwards a distinguished Indian official.

For this, I should say, was a famous, nay, a historic place, though now passed from its ancient owners. My hosts being near relatives of the latter, I had the free range of everything out-of doors that would make glad the heart of youth. But at this moment many sheets of water of various sizes with their enormous possibilities held my fancy fast. I had left

Exmoor with a wholly new outlook on many things. Above all, the streams and rivers that in traversing England the train strode in its course, became objects of life, interest, and speculation. Here were pools and lakes almost at the door. I knew nothing of bottom-fishing, but that very fact enhanced the mystery and the adventure. None of that mild float-fishing with nurse or governess, so often engaged in by juveniles, had ever come my way. Now, however, I lost not an hour. By the advice of a sympathetic butler who rummaged out some tackle, and with a tin of worms, I commenced operations in a round pool, some hundred yards in diameter and known in local geography as the marlpit. This resulted in my first introduction to the roach, whose novelty of appearance after the Exmoor trout gave some zest to its capture. But a day or two later I found myself in Shrewsbury, with a view, I think, to buying tackle, in company with my very much looked-up-to friend, and we turned into what was then a celebrated tackle-shop. Its proprietor, as a matter of fact, was something of a notability, and as an expert taxidermist rather closely associated with the great house in the park, which contained a fine private museum of stuffed birds and beasts. The old gentleman suggested we should lunch with him, which we did very handsomely in a room above the shop, on a portion of a beautiful salmon he had killed in the Wye the day before, after a hard fight, which he described at length. So I was getting on! My companion rallying me at table anent my devotion to the roach in the marlpit, Mr. S—— remarked, 'Why don't you catch some of

the pike there; I 'm pretty sure it has been stocked. I 'll give you some gimp hooks when we go downstairs and show you how to fix a live roach on, and then you can try them.'

He was as good as his word, and next day I proceeded to carry out his instructions. To my delight in a very short time away went the roach, and carefully observing the time limit for gorging impressed upon me, I eventually felt the little Exmoor fly-rod bending before the rather sullen excursions hither and thither of what seemed to my callow experience a rather unenterprising whale. It was really only a two pound jack (which I estimated at twice that weight). But two pounds was two pounds on Exmoor—very much so! I had by this time acquired habits of restraint and did not try to fling the pike over my head, but our tutor, who had come to witness the experiment and was not a fisherman, got greatly excited. We hauled it out successfully, and to shorten the story we (for my preceptor raised a rod and joined in the fray) repeated the experiment again and again till within the next four or five days we had grassed about fourteen small pike. After this there was a lull, of so persistent a nature, that we turned our attention to wider fields of enterprise. Some days later, however, I was sitting alone at the same pond, fishing for roach with a view to bait and another attempt at the pike, when a voice behind me called out, 'Hullo, young 'un, what sport?'

Turning round I beheld a smart-whiskered gentleman whom I knew to be the son and heir of the great

man who was here lord of all. He sat down on the bank beside me, mighty Nimrod and celebrated shot though he was, and discoursed learnedly on the best baits for roach. I soon let him know, however, that roach were not the limit of my aspirations or indeed of my trophies, and, in short, that I was only in pursuit of them for pike bait, following up with an account of the recent triumphs. 'Pike!' said he. 'You don't mean it! How many have you taken out of here?'

'Fourteen,' said I without a thought that so wonderful an achievement would be accounted as aught but a merit.

'The devil you have! and that I believe is about the number I put in here last Easter to stock the pond. Hang it! That is the precise number! There are none left!'

I felt like taking an immediate leap into the pond and remaining there.

After a truly painful silence he began, to my infinite relief, to laugh loudly, swore I was a dangerous chap to be about, that he would tell his uncle (my host) to send me home or I should be cleaning out the big lake next, and so on.

Oddly enough I never caught but one more pike in my whole life, and that was the very next year, and it weighed almost as much as the whole fourteen from the marlpit. On this occasion I was staying with friends in south Devon, and we drove over one day to Slapton Ley, that curious freshwater mere only divided from the sea by a strip of beach. My kind host, almost as an afterthought and purely for my

benefit, hired a boat with man and tackle from the hotel, and we, he and I, went a-fishing. There were two rods, one for small fry, perch and suchlike, the other for pike with live bait and tackle. My friend not being an angler took charge of the former. I, as an angling maniac and on the strength of my recent Shropshire performance, took charge of the pike-rod. In due course I had a run, and when the time for striking came I thought I had hold of the bottom of the lake. But it wasn't; it was an enormous pike, and in about a quarter of an hour, with the help of the boatman, we had it on board, and it weighed eighteen pounds. Curiously enough it was the largest that had been killed in that public water for many years. If it had been January instead of August it would have been much heavier. My kind friend had it mounted for me by old Pulman of Totnes, and I have it still. The veteran taxidermist and fly-tier was so tickled at the notion of so juvenile an angler being responsible for so large a fish that throughout the next year or two when he forwarded my shilling or half-crown's worth of flies he used to insert after my name on the envelope 'The Great Pike Catcher!' It was the last pike of my life. I rested on my laurels. As a matter of fact it was a branch of the sport that never came much in my way nor made any particular appeal to me. That was in truth a memorable year to me. For it had so happened that the very month before I had by a very similar accident achieved an even greater triumph, which must assuredly be recounted as this is a chapter of childish things.

By the summer of this my second season on Exmoor

I had become pretty handy with a trout-rod for a boy of fourteen, and could kill two or three dozen fish on a good day, treat a half-pounder in the water with respect, and spin a Devon minnow, when the state of the river demanded that alternative, reasonably well. A worm in our circle was for some reason absolutely taboo. I think the prejudice against it was, and still is, pretty strong in Devonshire. But as previously recorded, I had learned a great many other things too, particularly a good deal of physical geography, with trout, incredible though the fact may seem, as a sort of basis for it. I had already divided England into two distinct portions, one worthy of desire, the other of no account at all. I had always in my mind an as yet imperfectly defined line which ran down from Yorkshire slantingwise to south Devon. West of this line was mentally tabulated a good country, one of hills and moors and rapid trouting streams. East of it was a dull stodgy region of tame outlook and sluggish rivers, mainly given over to coarse fish. Wales and the north, particularly the former, as I had looked constantly upon its distant mountains, both from Exmoor and from Shropshire, was to me a land of dreams and future trouting possibilities strongly tinged with romance. I have that feeling about England still, with certain modifications, and couldn't shake it off if I tried, though I know nearly the whole of both sides of that line and can draw the last with greater precision. The sentiment of locality or atmosphere was extraordinarily active in my youthful breast even then, and at seventeen or eighteen it had grown stronger still. It was Catholic

in that it was aroused by any sample of the one type of country and as indiscriminately repelled by the other.

Just before the summer holidays, after which I was going to a public school, I heard to my delight that instead of the usual move to Switzerland of my parents we were going *en famille* to North Wales. Visions of real mountains, of lakes and streams, visions partly romantic and partly trouty rose gloriously before me. I fairly shivered as it occurred to me that Norfolk or the Isle of Wight might for strong reasons have been the alternative. Marvellous to relate, too, came a maternal intimation that my father had some idea of taking up trout-fishing and that I was at once to choose him a rod. It appears that my boyish ardour had proved infectious in a most unsuspected quarter. So an order was dispatched to Bowden of Exeter, and when the samples came a committee of three, the rector in the chair, myself, and another, undertook the selection of a rod for a middle-aged academic dignitary who had never even seen a fly thrown. I hope I may be forgiven for an ulterior interest in that rod. It was impossible to resist the conviction that it would in no long time be mine, which indeed proved correct and I used it for years. Indeed the rector I am sure privately shared these unworthy anticipations, for he winked quite obviously as he gave his casting vote for a serviceable little rod 'very like my own.'

Llanfairfechan, a small place in those days, proved to be our prospective headquarters, and as we sped along the Holyhead line towards it I watched the hills growing into real mountains with profound exaltation.

Now Llanfairfechan is very handy to mountain wilds, and I lost no time in searching the map for brooks and tarns, of which there are several obscure ones within reach, and without more a-do proceeded to range the waste, rod in hand. It was familiar enough going after Exmoor with a difference only in the awe-inspiring mountains of the Snowdon range which bounded the near horizon and affected me no little. My boyish efforts on the then attenuated Welsh brooks and unruffled tarns of a rather dry July were naturally not productive. I did not yet realise that trout required some freshening up of the waters to bestir themselves in that most torpid month, or that a breeze was indispensable for lake fishing. A showery afternoon in the Aber stream below the waterfall, I remember, provided the only gleam of success save the great achievement to which all this is leading up. For it so happened that by good luck, though at the moment I did not look at it this way, I was persuaded to go into Bangor and have an offending tooth out. The Holyhead line, it may be remembered, just before reaching that ancient little cathedral town, crosses a viaduct under which the Ogwen river may be seen rushing swiftly down into the bordering woods of Penrhyn castle. It is a glimpse to make any fisherman's mouth water. It was altogether too much for me in spite of a toothache at that fevered period, when the mystery of unsatisfied experiences was overmastering.

When I returned to Llanfairfechan minus a tooth and ready for anything, the Ogwen river was the burden of my theme. My father had not even taken

his rod out of its case except on the lawn before leaving home, when his only remark was that it reminded him of a whip, for he was very fond of driving. Indeed, my efforts at great expenditure of time and muscle had not been encouraging to his maiden ones. Moreover in such a country, in fine weather, other attractions had naturally been strong. But he thoroughly sympathised with the gentle art though he continued to leave it severely alone, and permanently as it so proved. In a moment of inspiration, however, it was remembered that my godfather was a relative of the owner of this glorious glimpse of wood and water, so a letter was dispatched forthwith to that kindly soul, and in due course a missive arrived at breakfast addressed to me from Penrhyn castle presenting its distinguished owner's compliments and permission to fish for two days in the Penrhyn water for *trout* (underlined). 'He thinks you are a grown-up,' said one of my small sisters, surveying the address on the important-looking envelope, a just remark no doubt. 'It is quite obvious,' said my father drily, 'that your exploit upon the marlpit at H—— has got about the world.' For myself I had not read the *Field* diligently for two years for nothing, and moreover salmon ran up our Exmoor stream in late autumn to spawn. So I explained that this merely precluded me from fishing for salmon. 'And why shouldn't he catch salmon as well as trout,' said my mother in a rather aggrieved tone of voice—an ingenuous remark, for which her East Anglian breeding was, in those days, a sufficient excuse.

A friend of ours from Bangor happened to turn up

that day, and hearing of my contemplated exploit kindly offered to put me up for the night as being nearer the scene of action. In the meantime, to my infinite joy and the disgust no doubt of Llanfairfechan generally, a heavy rain fell and the local brook, hitherto a bed of large boulders, with an almost imperceptible trickle between them, came down in spate. I judged my time as it proved to a nicety, and a day or two afterwards took an early train to Bangor and found my way, I forget how, to the stretch below the railway viaduct. The river was still a thought high but dropping down into a nice colour. This was much the biggest job I had yet undertaken, even without the unimaginable adventure which it brought about. Indeed, I had a rather disconcerting sensation of not being equal to it. The river was much too wide to cover from the bank, and at that moment too deep and rapid to wade; I felt my little Exmoor rod to be distinctly inadequate. But I could throw a pretty good line for my age, and succeeded in capturing a few rather modest trout. Then came a moment of great excitement, and I got into a sea trout whose sides glittered gloriously as he leapt again and again out of the water. It was only a small one, about three-quarters of a pound, but a big fish to me when I got him successfully out on to a gravelly beach. It was not very long after this quite exhilarating event when my tail fly, a Devon red palmer with gilt twist, as it was sweeping round from somewhere near midstream, was seized, and I experienced something of a shock. The rod point went down, my line, of which I had only thirty yards, began to whiz from the reel, and I

found myself chasing a leviathan down the banks at full speed. Mercifully the rush was short, for just below in a big pool matters came to a stop. I have no clear idea how the fish and I kept on terms as the former bored about the pool, but I had a pretty fair notion of what gut would stand and had enough line for immediate purposes.

At that ever-blessed moment, however, I heard an exclamation, and the keeper, as it proved to be, appeared beside me. The fish had not jumped, but I did not need him to tell me it was a salmon, though I needed him desperately to help me struggle with it. If he had approached in just wrath at seeing an urchin in round jackets fishing his best salmon water at the very moment of its perfection, he bridled his choler and entered into the spirit of the fray, shouting instructions in Welsh-English as the fish bored about the pool. Just below us was a single large alder-tree projecting from the bank. If the fish took another dart down stream, we, or at least I, was absolutely done, for the water beneath the tree was unwadeable. This is just however what the salmon proceeded very shortly to do, whereupon the Welshman snatched the rod out of my hand, and slid into the river up to his waist. Holding the little rod in his left hand, and grasping the brush round the alder trunk with his right he swung himself round somehow and scrambled out on to the bank beyond and after the fish again, who came to a halt in another pool just below. Here he returned me the rod, and as there were no more rushes the battle eventually ended in our favour, the keeper tailing the fish on a bit of gravel beach. It was a

beauty, fresh from the sea and of just six pounds weight. As it stretched its shapely length upon the grass the earth for me swam round in wild career, and I thanked heaven for my godfather and my once accursed tooth. The keeper genuinely pleased, I think, with so adroitly saving the fish, and possibly melted by the momentary distinction I had achieved, forbore to press the mystery of my presence in this sacred spot. So it fell to me to take the initiative. I produced my letter and was quite ready to go before the magistrates or even to prison, if necessary, for exceeding the conditions contained therein. However, the keeper only laughed. And when my prospective host from Bangor appeared upon the amazing scene, which he did very shortly as pre-arranged, and gave the worthy Welshman five shillings, it was a fitting crown to the great moment so far of my brief life.

The pike raid of the preceding year faded into insignificance beside this glorious day. The eighteen-pound pike of the following month, though more curious as a mere incident, did not exalt me to nearly the same extent. The events of the afternoon are not worthy of remembrance; I looked for a salmon every throw, but found only a few small trout. As I walked that summer evening, however, through the streets of Bangor carrying the fish conspicuously displayed, I was probably the proudest wight that ever trod its pavements. My host had kindly asked two or three boy friends to his bachelor dinner-table that night when we ate the fish. They were older and I dare say wiser than I, but they seemed to me on that

occasion mere children. A heavy rain that night and rising water robbed me of my second day. But I could bear even that now. I should have preferred perhaps to have taken the salmon back to Llanfairfechan instead of only the sea trout and the minor fry, as it would have made an impression on a family innocent of these things, such as a mere narrative supported by figures in avoirdupois could not do. My father realised something at any rate of its import. But my mother who, though she ate a great many of my trout in after years, never grasped anything associated with the catching of them, merely remarked that she was glad I had caught one salmon at least, as she thought the clause about the trout in my letter of permission just a little shabby!

Yet upon the whole I think the dinner in Bangor gave greater satisfaction than would even the exhibition of the salmon in the domestic circles. For the other boy guests who had been some time at a public school were no doubt prepared to be patronising. My host, moreover, decided that we would say nothing to them about the keeper's assistance. And I dare say I comported myself as if a salmon was an everyday occurrence.

School life in those days, when there was often no Easter vacation at all, or a very short one, and the summer holidays began at the end of June and closed in mid August, was dead against trout-fishing. The west country streams had generally run to nothing, and the trout in any case waxed indifferent, while as for the Kennet, it presented a solid surface from bank to bank of flowering weeds, upon which you could

almost walk. One memorable summer, however, I was voted old enough to appreciate Switzerland. Old enough indeed! My respected seniors little guessed what hills and mountains had been to me this long time.

We were a party of eight, six grown-ups, an Oxford freshman, and myself, aged seventeen. I had ascertained that there were trout in Switzerland and the rod went along—the one purchased for my father, which had now, as foretold, been definitely handed over. It got me into trouble at the very first start off. For after a day or two in Paris, then in the heyday of the second empire, we were starting for Switzerland, and for some specific purpose or other I arrived at the Paris station rather before the rest of the party. To make sure no doubt that if all of our baggage went wrong, a possibility that to a young and callow Briton seemed imminent, my rod should not, I stuck to it, and was walking up and down the platform with it in my hand, waiting for the others. Now it so happened that the screw of the spike at the end of the butt had rusted in, and not being able to withdraw it, this, to the French eye, apparently formidable spear-head protruded beyond the case. I was presently tapped on the shoulder by a gentleman in uniform who, pointing to my Exmoor rod, asked me (I presume) why I was carrying about a deadly weapon. My French was that of the regulation two hours a week, so contemptuously regarded at a public school, and not calculated to oil the wheels of foreign travel.

So I could only look helplessly round for some of our party to come and ease the situation. In the mean-

time I was disarmed or I would have unfastened the case and displayed the ridiculously inoffensive nature of the suspected thing. Then another official in the uniform apparently of a field-marshal was called into animated council, during which the two examined the spear and felt its point.

I ought perhaps to say in possible extenuation of these strange proceedings that attempts on the life of the emperor were just then much on the official mind. I was then beckoned to follow the two gorgeous ones, and as they had my precious rod, there was no alternative. I was conducted the whole length of the platform, after the manner, so it struck me, of a conspirator caught in the very act, and then into a room where a third field-marshal was writing at a desk. Then a tremendous discussion took place, during which I was again accosted, and of course to no purpose whatever. I tried to get hold of the rod to undo its wrappings and expose the absurdity of the business, but this perhaps was regarded as the action of a desperado, and I was so disconcerted that even the elementary French that had survived from the governess period refused to come. At last, however, a brilliant inspiration seized me, and I ejaculated very loud '*Mon père et ma mère ici—dans la station.*' 'Ha ha!' said the gorgeous ones taking me by the shoulder. Another of the field-marshals bearing the deadly weapon a-head, they marched me back along the platform, where to my relief I espied our party just arrived. They were a good deal startled to see me apparently under arrest, and when I explained to them the cause the ladies went into such peals of laughter that my

escort began to look more truculent than ever, and I trembled lest in some way I should become the innocent victim of their unseemly mirth. My father however succeeded in maintaining a straight face, and with the utmost politeness informed them, so I gathered, that I was an innocent British schoolboy and that the instrument I was carrying was only a fishing-rod. This was accepted with salutes all round, and thus was I snatched from the jaws of the Bastille and restored to the bosom of my prodigiously amused family. How little my respected sire guessed when he inspired the purchase of that rod, and how little we recked when we selected it on the lawn of the Exmoor rectory, that it would ever be in the hands of French officials as a suspected instrument for the murder of the French emperor! Seriously, however, I have not to this day the remotest notion what these people were after.

We had scarcely touched Swiss soil before my piscatorial ardour nearly landed the Oxonian and myself in an awkward and ludicrous situation. My friend, who is now, by the way, a most distinguished dean, though he hailed from a trouting country, was not much given over to the pursuit of fish. But we spent a day and night at Constance, and adventuring the shore of the lake at evening I hauled out a good-sized fish, of the carp tribe, which acted so powerfully on my companion's mind that we agreed to get up early the next morning and repeat the experiment at the same spot about a mile from the town. By a mere accident I have my fishing journal for this year, and the strange fish it recorded as an 'arle,' weight one

and a quarter pounds, and the bait cheese! We were abjured and implored to be back for breakfast and an early start for the Engadine via Chur, and threatened in case of failure to be abandoned to our fate as helpless British boys, in a strange land, innocent of any speech but our own. For I do not think I am doing my friend the dean an injustice in saying that he was then scarcely more effective than I in this particular, though he was a scholar of his college.

We carried our scheme out only too thoroughly. What possessed us I cannot think. Whether the big fish demonstrated in tantalising fashion—for we caught none—neither of us at this day can recall, or whether we jointly suffered from mental aberration as to the flight of time. But it is quite certain that the first thing which awoke us to our situation was the rumble of a train along the lake shore just behind us and frantic shouts and waving of handkerchiefs from a carriage window. Then we knew we were lost. We had no money to speak of in our pockets, nor did I know precisely whither our party were bound. Possibly my companion knew just so much. A wild but, as it proved, saving instinct seized both of us. Without a moment's hesitation, I carrying the rod with the bait still on the hook, we started off in pursuit of the train, the demonstrations from the window, though growing more distant, cheering us on. It was those alone indeed that buoyed us on. We thought it suggested some hope, absurd though it seemed to run after a railway train, howsoever slow its pace. As a matter of fact we proved by a mere accident to be little over half a mile from the next station. But

we ran one of those agonising sprints that most of us have had occasionally to suffer at one time or another. Doubtless our party by painting the tragedy of the situation, melted the heart of the stationmaster, or possibly even oiled his palm. But at any rate we arrived in time and fell panting and breathless, rod and all, into the laps of our most indignant seniors. I am afraid that this here veraciously narrated incident was told with growing improvements, in the circle to which we both belonged, for many a long year afterwards. Indeed, I have listened to it oftentimes myself, how we raced a slow Swiss train, caught it up in full career, and were dragged through the window; and for myself, I almost came to believe in these, its heroic features. But at the time far from being heroes we were in considerable disgrace with the rest of the party for our quite unpardonable absent-mindedness.

A dull, cheerless, showery day at Chur, where some small, attenuated, blue-looking boiled trout, served cold, had aroused my curiosity and also contempt from a culinary point of view, sent me out scouring the country, rod in hand. The first mountains of six thousand feet or so I had ever seen towered immediately above, I remember, and impressed me mightily. A mile or two away I came upon the upper Rhine, a big stream sprawling just here over a broad, shallow, stony bed. Having, as already noted, the sentiment of topography strong within me, I burned to record the capture of one trout at least in the famous river. I succeeded just so far, wading into cold, half blue, half milky-looking shallows and killing one miserable specimen after the pattern of those

served in the hotel. However, I have it duly entered in my journal. July 1st.—*Rhine, one trout.* Settled in the Engadine for most of the ensuing month, between the mountain climbs or on wet days, of which last I remember there was a fair sprinkling, I scoured the lakes and streams over what is now the happy hunting-ground, winter and summer, of thousands of tourists. In those days it had only been partially discovered. The hotels were few, small, and undeniably rough. A sizeable caravanserai at St. Moritz alone suggested any flavour of the outer world. But, large or small, they seemed to me most dreary and forlorn, though I probably troubled their interior as little perhaps as any one. Though neither an epicure nor a sybarite the food struck even me as unpalatable and painfully monotonous. My seniors, who were old habitués, came prepared to rough it and to depend largely on bread, honey, stewed fruit, and boiled trout. I shared, I am afraid, the schoolboy prejudice of that day for a beef and beer diet. We were regaled to be sure with portions of what my experienced elders alluded to with holiday levity as *goat*, but I did not myself see any fun in it. But the outdoor fascinations of course far outweighed the indoor shortcomings of the then primitive Engadine. The landlord seemed to be on terms of old acquaintance with the few English who then forgathered here, most of them university dons or the like, all of whom seemed to know personally one or other of our party. We were at Pontresina mostly, and neither there nor anywhere else except at the St. Moritz hotel could there have been accommodation for very many visitors. What the epicu-

rean tourists of to-day would have said to the *ménage* I cannot imagine!

The trouting potentialities of the Engadine, however, offered to my but half-experienced eye a great and virgin field, not virgin in one sense, for the native anglers were in considerable evidence, and doubtless are so still, with gigantic bamboo poles, from which they flung an impaled grasshopper on lake and stream. They wondered at my little jointed rod and Mr. Pulman's flies, for I doubt if they had ever seen such an outfit before. No Englishman, so far as I could learn, had ever then fished there. I had compiled a fishing vocabulary, which I still have, of about forty German words relating to the sport. So with the help of gesticulations I could put leading questions to my brother sportsmen if not exchange fish stories with them. But they either did not answer at all, or overwhelmed me with such torrents of eloquence that I was glad to escape, no wiser than before. The trout were small, sometimes of a colour and condition that won my approval, sometimes of the blue and starveling type suggestive of glacier water. I was not very successful, but it was novel and interesting, and on each occasion some fresh prospect held out untold possibilities. The experiences of Devonshire no doubt wanted some readjustment. But one or two ventures did prove quite successful.

Now my Oxonian companion had been quite badly bitten by my enthusiasm, and for lack of alternative had invested a franc or two in a twenty-foot bamboo pole. It was unhandy to be sure as an article of baggage, and when we shifted quarters I well remember

him bearing it nobly aloft on an eight-hour walk over one of the passes into Italy, which will attest the measure of his new-born zeal. It happened that we were all stopping a few days at the little hotel, then the only one on the shores of the top lake of the Engadine—Sils Maria, I think it is called. One afternoon, just below the outlet from this lake of the river Inn, where it swished gently through some hay meadows, my friend and I struck a really good rise of fish, and nice well-conditioned ones, too. We were pulling them out almost every cast, the bamboo participating fully in the sport, when we became aware of a tall and portly figure advancing towards us with minatory gesture. It was evidently the proprietor of the meadows, and though the waters were not preserved, it was, we learned, and is still, no doubt, in Switzerland a high misdemeanour to tread even harmlessly upon the edge of hay-fields before the crop has been cut. This may have been the situation, then, but we did not realise it, or we may possibly have been merely wading in the shallow edge of the water. At any rate we held, and probably with justice, that we were doing no damage. And when the old gentleman opened fire with volley after volley, concerning the purport of which there could be no manner of doubt, we merely rejoined at intervals, I regret to say, with a '*Nein Deutsch, nein Deutsch.*' The sport was too good; we simply could not leave it. And I fear we didn't till the rise stopped and our persecutor had long retired shaking his stick at us and inveighing, no doubt, with what breath he had left on the accursed British race. On that occasion we quite filled a long botanical

tin I had borrowed from one of the ladies and used to carry slung on a strap in lieu of a creel. On the next day, I see by the before-mentioned journal, I got nearly as good a basket close to the outlet of the lake. A black palmer and a red-upright (red quill) being recorded as the effective lures on both occasions. I should have assuredly remembered the first item without the assistance of the journal if only for an amusing scene that occurred in the *salle à manger* of the little inn where we were staying. The success of these two days had greatly impressed our waiter, a tall, sad-looking man, who apparently in his leisure hours—otherwise those of the night—was an ardent wielder of the bamboo and grasshopper. He exhibited great amazement and curiosity at the fragile and diminutive nature of our artificial flies. So I presented him with a few black palmers, upon which he fell on his knees upon the bare floor, and clasping my two hands between his own, poured out a torrent of gratitude before the rest of the party, who were greatly impressed. He went out, so he told us the next morning, and fished all night on the strength of it, but alas! caught nothing, as might, perhaps, poor fellow, be expected under the circumstances.

I never shall forget, however, one tragic incident that happened a few days after this, and though it had nothing to do with fishing, it had everything to do with a mountain stream. I cannot recall the name of the place or the precise locality, never having been in Switzerland since. But I think it occurred during a few days in the Austrian Tyrol. I remember we journeyed for hours in *berg-wagons*, by rough tracks

through pine forests and picnicked at an old bear-hunter's hut. Thence proceeding, we reached a valley village crossing at its entrance a little brook we scarcely noticed, it was so insignificant. Just after reaching the rustic inn, early in the afternoon, one of the most fearful storms I have ever seen, either in the old or the new world, burst upon the devoted spot, accompanied by terrific thunder and lightning, while the rain fell for three or four hours in solid sheets. Possibly what the Americans call a cloudburst occurred higher up. For within that period the trifling brook had become a raging torrent, rolling great rocks before it through the village as if they had been packing-cases. The village itself was on a slope and no great damage was done to the buildings, but the entire breadth of tillage and meadow lands filling the floor of the narrow valley, and on which the inhabitants depended for their livelihood, was absolutely destroyed; not merely the crops of the year, which would have meant mere temporary disaster, but the soil was washed clean away and nothing left but the hard sterile pan, littered with great deposits of sand and gravel and masses of rocks and boulders. The despair of the unfortunate people was dreadful, and it was in truth a most harrowing scene, being unprecedented in the experience of that generation. The women flung themselves on their knees or rushed wildly hither and thither with their menfolk. It fell to my father, the only man remaining of our now diminished party, to be the recipient, in the excitement of the moment, of many woebegone out-pourings which I witnessed. When we got home he wrote to the papers and got

up a subscription for the ruined village, but I cannot imagine how life went with them. For I have often since that time seen alluvial valley land washed away after the same fashion in America, and know well what it means. But in such cases it was merely portions of large properties, and the loss was not irretrievable. But still the land affected remains useless for ages, and how these unfortunates fared, to whom their land was their all, I cannot conceive.

## II

## THE WELSH DEE

THE cult of the Highlands has been so dominant among south country sportsmen and tourists of later generations, that the ancient fame of the Welsh Dee has been in a measure eclipsed by its northern namesake. It seems always to require the distinguishing prefix which writers on the Scottish Dee appear to regard as superfluous. Royalty, moreover, now dwells upon the banks of the Highland river, and has further glorified it. It is a long time since seven kings rowed upon the Welsh Dee with their would-be Saxon suzerain as cox, though how they succeeded with such a lob-sided crew in trimming the boat history does not say. The Angevin and Plantagenet kings knew only one Dee, this Welsh one, and that pretty nearly as well as they knew the Thames, and usually to their great discomfort. And did not Henry of Bolingbroke and his son know every yard of its banks from Chirk to Bala through the long years before they had finished with its unconquerable son Owain of Glyndyfrdwy, Owen of the Glen of the Dee. Moreover, is not the Dyfrdwy by ancient tradition held as sacred, a fact its very name proclaims to the initiated.

Divine mystic attributes have vaguely clung to its clear restless waters since time began for bards and seers, and it has pleased them all from Taliesin to Tennyson to fancy that its streams whisper the forgotten secrets of ancient days. The dry-fly purist, I know, feels none of these things. Nay, he seems almost to resent their association with fishing. He does not understand what they have to do with it, and so there is nothing more to be said. But there are no dry-fly purists upon the Dee. It is pre-eminently a wet-fly river. For myself I admit without shame that the romantic scenery of the upper, or Welsh, half of the Dee, and more especially that which I have chiefly frequented, added to the wealth of story that gathers about its banks, has been to me an infinite addition to the more material but engrossing pursuit of its fish.

Now, in the very heart of North Wales, fringed with the gracious verdure of farms, hamlets, and country houses, but in the lap of overhanging grouse moors, Llyn Tegid, or as we usually call it from the little town at its lower end, Bala lake, spreads its five-mile length. The Dee comes brawling out of it a full-fledged lusty river, having entered it but a trifling brook. It is sometimes said, probably by those who have had but a passing glance from the train windows, that Bala lake is of no great scenic account. I don't know how that may be. But from its unruffled bosom on a still summer evening, I have seen the peaks of Arran, which pile up some three thousand feet behind its western end, reflecting their shapely masses in its glassy surface as in a mirror. This I think is sufficient,

even if it were all or anything like all, to save the character of a sheet of water that is hardly twice as far from London as the Norfolk Broads! Out of these wild hills and moors that mass themselves behind the head of Bala lake, as do other moors and mountains farther back, and less obviously, to the north and south of it, come leaping many impetuous streams; notably three, of which the smallest and the middle one holds the honours, and with piping voice proclaims itself the Dyfrdwy, otherwise the sacred Dee.

Why it should be so I know not, for both the others to the north and south respectively, the Twrch and the Lliw, are quite sizeable fishing streams, while the Dyfrdwy is something less than that. The habitual traveller to Barmouth or Dolgelly knows it well, if not its import, as the train climbs up the lonely pass towards the seacoast watershed, for as a brown peaty brook, playing among the mosses, the bogs, the rocks, the alders, and the birches, it twists in and out of the line till somewhere in the bosky foreground it disappears from sight and mind. And if the traveller cranes his neck a little and knows when to look up, he will see for a moment or two the crest of Arran Benllyn, with a patch of snow in most months upon its northern tip. It is not for nothing that the infant Dee comes breaking out from its foot, since it is this sombre birthplace that made the great river below sacred in the eyes of the men of old and in the ears of poets of all ages. For here, following tradition, Spenser places the scene of young King Arthur's upbringing by Timon, his foster father.

22703, J. V.

CARROG BRIDGE ON THE DEE

His dwelling is low in a valley green,
Under the foot of Rauran[1] mossy hore,
From whence the River Dee, as silver clean,
His tumbling billows roll with gentle rore:
There all my days he trained me up in vertuous lore.

But it was not hereabouts that I used to go, and occasionally still go, seriously a-fishing. For there is a bit of the river, some seven miles in all, that for the last quarter of a century has always held me as the period of the March brown draws near—sometimes only in dreams, sometimes to accomplishment. This is between the old five-arched stone bridge at Llansaintffraid—lately re-christened Carrog, since there are seventeen Llansaintffraids in Wales, and the chain bridge over the rapids at Berwyn just above Llangollen. From Bala to Corwen, a dozen miles, and indeed on to Carrog, two miles below again, the curving river sweeps through the meadowy vale of Edeyrnion in alternating stream and pool and always overhung by the high, waving barrier of the Berwyn mountains. After this it enters the narrow troughs of Glyndyfrdwy and thenceforward, amid a beautiful confusion of wood and rock, pressed between unfolding heights of quite imposing stature, urges its resounding course into the famous vale of Llangollen.

The traveller by the Great Western to the west coast watering-places, already invoked at the cradle of Arthur, scarcely leaves the Dee, from its entry into England at Ruabon to its source in the Arrans. In the reaches I have in mind, however, the river is so buried in woods that there is little to be seen of it after the

[1] Arran.

burst of the leaf. In the days of that misnamed insect, the March brown, however, otherwise early or mid April, there are not yet any leaves. The larch is having its brief hour of pre-eminence, and with the radiancy of its fresh tender green is filling the souls of men with thankfulness before they forget it in the ampler promise of spring. The willows, too, are helping to brighten the still brown and gray tone of the woods, and the buds of the giant sycamores that love the banks and hillsides of the Dee are but waiting for a week of zephyrs and sunshine to strike yet one more note of gladness in the great curtain of foliage.

I know nowhere any finer vistas of woodland and fretting waters than unfold themselves to the few whose privilege it is to follow them through the lengthening days and through the ancient domain of the mysterious hero of Wales. The railroad, moreover, here abandons for once in sheer despair the tortuous defiles of the Dee, and burrowing through the great shoulder of a mountain, leaves the river to describe a wide horse-shoe loop of several miles and to chafe the broad green base of Moel Gamelin, whose crest, some seventeen hundred feet in air, makes again and again a perfect background to the glancing waters and the encompassing woods. But you must be down in the water to see all this, and the wading is as rough and slippery as that of any bit of river it has ever been given me to walk about in, and these have been a good few. It is not nice to sit down suddenly, certainly not in the Dee in April, for the chill of the snow is generally still in the water. The trout are astir betimes here, and it may be added they retire early

—early in the season, that is to say. Save those of the lower Usk, which are even more so, I know no other river-trout in this respect so curious. Innocent wights, from Liverpool or elsewhere, come along in June, to say nothing of the next two months, and finding a glorious-looking river just fining down perhaps from a flood, take out a ticket, and, unless the look of the wading scares them, labour diligently and full of hope. But they never catch anything to speak of, not with a fly at any rate, and comparing notes with other innocents perhaps upon the bank, or with others in the outside world, they decide that the Dee is no good, or that there are no trout. They have never seen a rise of March brown on the sacred stream, nor yet those baskets, sometimes hovering on twenty pounds weight, that in early April are lifted out of the coracle in the evening at the horse-shoe weir by Llantisilio.

The basket, to be sure, may be proportionately light, for Dee trout are tricky, but not often does such misfortune fall to the coracle fisher of reasonable skill under reasonable conditions. For it should be explained that there are two methods of adventuring these Glyndyfrdwy waters. You may wade them or fish them dry-shod from a coracle as it bears you swiftly or slowly, according to the river's momentary humours, over the surface. The former is the more usual method, for the excellent reason that only one, or at the most two coracles with their skippers are available, according to the rules of the Association which controls these waters. And furthermore, when the river is low, which in a dry spring is of course the case, coracling is tiresome if not actually impossible.

There is nothing novel in a day's wading, though it has its little incidents. But trouting from a coracle in rapid water, as here practised, is an art unique, I think, in Great Britain, though there are coracles used under different conditions on some other Welsh rivers. I shall therefore say something of it. Certainly the exhilaration of those fevered hours, which once a year I generally treated myself to, is not decreased by the feeling that there are probably not twenty anglers in the kingdom who ever share such experiences.

When I first embarked on those novel voyages Evan Evans was the only licensed 'cwrwgle' man on the water, and both he and his craft abode at Llangollen. His procedure then, like that of his successors of to-day, was to come up with his coracle by the morning train to Carrog station, and there, two hundred yards away, on Llansaintffraid bridge, to find his fare awaiting him. For it was more than likely the latter would be stopping at that snug but simple little hostelry The Grouse, just above the bridge, where as many fish stories for the size of the place and its company have been told, I should think, as in any similar haunt in Britain, during the last half-century. For there were many miles of streamy, easily-waded waters handy to it for both trout and salmon, and nine miles of rugged, woody, and strong pent-up currents below. The inn windows, too, looked right down on the old seventeenth-century bridge with its five massive arches, through which you could hear the river softly swishing as you lay in bed at night.

Many an Easter tourist bound for Barmouth has

gaped wonderingly from the carriage window as Evan Evans or his successor hauls his relic of the Brythonic period out of the guard's van at Carrog station, hoists it on his back, and waddles away down the road towards the river, like some prehistoric tortoise on its hind-legs. For a coracle is really rather an uncanny thing at the first acquaintance, and there must be something uplifting in the sight of it. Otherwise its ejection from the guard's van at way-stations hereabouts would not stir up the English passengers in the way it invariably does—the young ones particularly. Indeed it is a fine opportunity for the Liverpool or Birmingham quiverful, of historical temperament, to test the diligence with which his offspring have perused the glowing pages of *Mrs. Markham* or whatever stands to-day for that incomparable book. I have heard him myself in my innumerable journeys up and down that bit of railroad improve the occasion more than once.

Indeed I feel strongly the ancient British sentiment of the coracle myself when I am rocking down the river in it, so utterly unlike is it to any other craft, while the romance of the passage heightens illusions. It is true that the wickerwork is now covered with tarpaulin instead of with the hides of *feræ naturæ*; but that is a detail. The shape is intimidating to the novice on first going aboard, a rough oblong, perhaps five feet long and half as wide, riding high in the water and pressed in a little at the waist, where a plank seat is stretched across. Upon this two feet or so of board the pilot and passenger sit side by side at extremely close quarters. The former wields a short one-bladed

paddle, the handle of which is pressed into his armpit while the blade is worked with one hand mainly under water. The figure eight is the normal stroke, but there are situations in a coracle's heady course down a river like this when the Lord knows what hieroglyphics the supple blade is compelled to describe on the churning waters.

Evan Evans was a man of method ever since he had become a teetotaller, and that was some four or five years before my visits to the river began. He always commenced operations with two dock glasses of port at The Grouse. When you asked him in the ordinary course of procedure in those bad old days what he would have, he always replied that he had long since sworn off liquor, but that he wouldn't mind a glass of port, which, it is needless to say, the prescient landlady had as nearly poured out as decency would allow. Then with the absurd freedom of those days, tempered, however, by a just discrimination of the effect of such an innocuous dose on a gentleman with a past—of which a word presently—and the prospective security of a long voyage with nothing on board but your pocket flask, you asked him to have another. This also he swallowed like a dose of medicine and then declared himself ready—nay, in a hurry to embark. I never ventured to call for a bottle of port in the most social hour at The Grouse, for the whisky was excellent, but I had confidence in its futility for evil in my pilot's case. You couldn't look at him and doubt this. Besides he had experienced one terrible warning, which indeed had forced him to take the pledge. For the reader may not be aware

that port is regarded as a temperance drink in the robuster circles of the class who are now our masters. But I have since ascertained that this is so. For the liberties of the pledged Evan Evans used to surprise and even pain me a little, though I was weak enough to pander to them. Now that I know better, I have long since regretted my uncharitable thoughts.

Moreover Evan was a teetotaller practically under compulsion, the committee of the Association having been the determining factor. In former days he had been more than a little addicted to *cwrw*[1] when on shore, which in his case was for most days of the year, like others who brave stormy waters and have more excuse. Some three or four years previously he had tipped over a member of Parliament in the Pentre pool, and there had been a great to-do, though the passenger with some difficulty got to shore and thereby saved the Government the unpleasantness of a by-election. The indignant politician said Evan had come aboard under the influence of *cwrw*. Evan stoutly denied it, and told his friends and all his succeeding fares that the statesman had lunched too well on the bank and upset him. It was awkward, as Evan, being a sportsman and much in company with the 'shentlemens,' was a stout Tory, and in consequence regarded askance by the minister of the chapel that his wife went to in Llangollen; while the politician was a Radical who lived sumptuously, so altogether it was rather awkward for Evan Evans. Expert coraclists, however, are extremely scarce, so the committee forgave him on the condition of total

[1] Ale.

abstinence, which terms Evan accepted, and stuck conscientiously to port ever after.

A short stiffish rod of eight or nine feet, a cast not too fine, and three flies was the outfit for a coracle, and after embarkation, which is always a delicate business, we swung out on to the bridge pool and commenced our seven or eight mile journey. We had to make it in rather less than that number of hours, for Berwyn station was the only point where the lower half of the water touched the railroad or anything like it, and as there were not many trains in April on that single-track line, we both, I to return, and my pilot with his boat to go on home to Llangollen, had to catch the last one. We fished, therefore, after the manner of coracle-fishing, as much water in an hour as a wader hereabouts would cover in a day. For in a coracle you are always on the move, slipping down and down with the current, casting rapidly here and there in the eddies, boils, or smooth fringes of the tumbling streams—fore-handed, back-handed, or any way that comes convenient at the moment.

There is no retracing your steps. Frequently there is no opportunity to throw a second time over a risen fish. In so large a river as the Dee, when it is fairly full, there is often a choice of routes through the long reaches of rocky and troubled waters. You can't indeed cover it all even in this hasty fashion; there is often an embarrassment of riches both to the right and to the left, and one of them has to be passed by untested. Sometimes one side is better than the other in the choice of trouty spots, and Evan is not likely to select the worst. Where the current is not

too strong, and extra tempting patches of surface come within reach of your flies, the skipper, by violent agitation of his paddle and some straining of body and legs, will hold you in position against the stream for a few fleeting moments. The aim of the coraclist is to run down sideways, so that the angler is casting crosswise with the streams while the pilot checks the pace at which we should naturally run. It may be one bank you are facing, it may be the other, or again the centre of the river for a short space, where the fashion of the rocks and ledges attract the angler's accustomed eye.

Till you get the right sense of proportion into your head, the wavering trail of the coracle seems strewn with vain regrets. All the time you are flitting over good water which it seems you can merely scratch, work as hard as you may and fish as fast as you can. There are sometimes half a dozen spots within reach at once, upon any of which under normal conditions you would cast a careful and expectant fly. But as it is, only one can be sampled, and that too both quickly and with some scope for judgment. It is a good test assuredly of the wet-fly fisherman's instinct for the hidden lair of a trout, of the 'smittle' spots, as they would say in Cumberland. Yet it is well to cast from a coracle as fast and as frequently as you can in reason. For it is not only that you thus cover a larger proportion of the tempting water, but much more often than not a trout takes a fly within two or three seconds of its lighting on the water. It is difficult to remember at first that though you are leaving five out of the six accessible casts untested, you are fishing say eight miles instead of one, which

more than equalises matters. Moreover the coracle has access to a vast amount of water that the wader cannot reach, and consequently to a less harried set of fish. Finally the coraclist, if handy at his job, enjoys the assurance that he will have a basket at the end of the day certainly twice, probably thrice, as heavy as any wader on the river. Dee trout run about three to the pound excluding those returned undersized, and that is a good fighting size in rapid mountain water like this. It means of course in a good basket plenty of half-pounders, and some odd ones running up to or over a pound. One is undeniably rough from a coracle upon those fish which can stand rough treatment. Good water as well as time is lost in playing a trout when drifting down, and the desire to get the landing-net under them as quickly as possible is overmastering. But you can't play pranks like this with a half-pounder in the Dee, still less with a larger fish. The best I ever got from a coracle was a pound and a quarter. The river was clearing from a freshet and but half-way back to the normal state with a strong rise of March brown on. He fastened near the tail of a strong smooth stream already quickening to the head of some boulder-strewn rapids, which threatened to put some strain on even Evan's powers of navigation. It was not only the coracle but the fish had to be forced back from the breakers, for trees kept us out of the bank. It was a problem that produced the most exciting ten minutes I ever had with a trout, but was in the end successfully solved. Evan was splendid, and it is amazing what a strain comparatively thin gut sometimes stands when it has *got to* !

But there are quiet and less breathless interludes even from a coracle. In the still reaches where the fretting river rests betimes, it is delightful to take your time and drift leisurely down over water that the wader must feign pass by with longing eyes, and shoot your flies beneath the trailing boughs. Here, if an over-venturesome cast fixes your fly in a twig, disengagement is easy. In the rapid water a similar mischance, as may be imagined, lands one in infinite difficulties and delays. Despatch is everything in a coracle if fish are rising, quickness in casting, in securing the fish (for the skipper cannot help you), disengaging the hook, or unravelling a tangle and getting the cast on to the water again. A tangle is distracting, so is a lost fly, for you cannot sit down on the bank for repairs and go on where you left off, but may be passing in enforced idleness over water that has been fondly looked forward to. In high water, too, there is an element of excitement in running some of the rapids, if you look at it that way. But when Evan, after surveying the angry surge and crowding rocks both above and below, all of which he knew by heart, used to say, 'I 'll try it whatefer,' one gripped the side of the coracle, gave a passing thought to the Radical M.P., and held tight. It was astonishing how he would lift the little tub-shaped craft this way and that as it rocked, rolled, and heaved along its apparently perilous course among the boulders.

A good many men who have seen it or tried it don't like coracling. For a large heavy man it is beyond a doubt a tight fit. Nor has it always much attraction for an individual who is not quite sure that he can swim

in his clothes. To others again, unaccustomed to light crafts, a coracle appears on the very face of it a truly perilous mode of conveyance. I discovered incidentally that an acquaintance who lived in Hertfordshire had once found himself fishing upon the Dee and had been induced to make the full voyage with Evan Evans, apparently on a high water. I asked him what sport he had had. 'Sport!' said he, 'I had quite enough to do hanging on for my life without fishing, and was only too thankful to get safely down.' But then he was six feet two. Moreover it was before Evan had become a total abstainer, and under the influence of *cwrw* he may have ridden his coracle over a line of country that two glasses of port would not rise to.

He was an interesting companion too was Evan in the slack moments of lunch on the bank or in blank hours. There was nothing of the long-skulled, swarthy, dreamy-looking Iberian aboriginal about him. Beyond a doubt he was of Goidelic stock, with a face like a harvest moon set in a halo of ginger whisker. He was in short what is known as a 'Red Welshman.' He read the river as an open book, but he was neither a poet nor, I am afraid, a saint. The rest of his intellectual outfit mainly consisted of a stock of iron-clad prejudices quite removed from those usually associated with his nation. He hated a preacher, for instance, as heartily as any Frenchman hates his wife's priest. He hated March browns tied without red legs. Above all he hated the wading fraternity, which automatically included myself on all days but the annual one, when he pretended to ignore my other

character. He declared they spoiled the river and scared the trout, a superstition that experience would hardly have endorsed. The waders by the way said the same of the coracles.

He was very different, for instance, from old Rhys the Watcher, who had no prejudices at all so far as I could ever find out, certainly none against coracles; but then he had no English to speak of. All flies with him were the best on the river, and every stray angler was 'a capital shentleman.' He was a dear old man, like an ex-lifeguardsman run a bit to seed, thin and tall with snowy whiskers. He carried the Celtic predilection, and a very nice one it is, for saying what he thought would be pleasant far beyond the bounds of reasonable veracity. But this was not because he was a liar, but because his English was so limited and his vocabulary only contained words of a friendly and optimistic description. He hadn't bothered to learn the others. Whereas Evan Evans's larger range included many 'damnatory' clauses indispensable to his stout convictions. When Rhys upon his daily round descended to the river, he always remarked it was a good day for fishing, of which he knew scarcely anything, even if it were a north wind and low water. But what was more serious, he would sometimes report great doings by the rod below before you knew him thoroughly, when your own basket was innocent of a single fish. He was worst of all on flies, as he had a stock phrase, 'Yes, yes, capital, the best,' to the great undoing of innocent, information-seeking strangers who had rigged up a cast effective enough perhaps in the Hebrides but perfectly useless on the Dee. He was so courteous,

and wished so well to everybody, it was impossible not to think he might extend his amenities to poachers. Peace to his ashes, for he is long dead and was not a teetotaller! But I missed him very much one April when a stalwart gamekeeper-looking man came along, who asked me for my ticket as if I had just discovered the river, and then informed me, rather more than laconically, that my white-whiskered friend was no more.

A run down the Dee on a coracle without a rod would be the ideal method of seeing one of the most delightful stretches of river scenery known to me. But armed with one, unless peradventure the trout proved obdurate, I cannot imagine a worse one. The exacting, almost feverish nature of this style of fishing excludes the romantic and the picturesque sufficiently from consideration for the purest of dry-fly purists. My sensations on stepping ashore in the evening by Llantisilio weir after a good day, though fraught with all the satisfaction of meritorious work achieved, were not unlike that of landing after a long sea voyage, in so far as the earth and all that is thereon appeared to be in active motion. Otherwise my cheeks would be burning, and a sense of having been all day endeavouring to catch up something slipping always away was strong upon me. There are blanks, however, as well as prizes even at this business.

Now the Dee is what is known as an east-wind river, and there are not, so far as I know, many such eccentric streams. More than one of my most thrilling hours have been spent here in a driving snowstorm, when I have seen the river literally alive with tumbling fish,

March browns, and snowflakes all mixed up together. But it does not do to count on this. One day, for instance, at the end of March, some years ago, I had arranged with Evan Evans's successor, a worthy veteran of more note in the local angling world than the other, to meet me at Glyndyfrdwy station two miles below Carrog. It turned out in truth a fearful morning, with a bitter north-east wind driving before it heavy storms of snow. But knowing the Dee, or thinking I did, I abandoned the cheerful breakfast-parlour of The Grouse with a hopeful heart. It was indeed my only chance on the river that spring, and I proceeded to keep the tryst. So did Griffith with his coracle, and when we met our eyes were so blinded with cold snow that we couldn't see each other. For late snows in spring and early snows in autumn commend me to the valley of the upper Dee! Griffith, unlike his predecessor, being a Radical, had a *Manchester Guardian* with him; I being a Conservative had brought along a *Liverpool Courier*, these two papers dividing North Wales between them.

So we took off our coats in the waiting-room of the little station, whose enigmatic-seeming name upon the platform is of all others on this line the joy and wonder of the Cockney tripper, and wrapped ourselves round and round in the leading articles, market reports, and advertisements of our respective organs. Buttoning our coats over all, we walked to the neighbouring shore, rigged up the tackle, and launched our bark on to what looked like a waste of black waters surging dimly through a thick white veil. We did not enjoy ourselves, though we actually caught two or three fish in

the first reach. But the cold was too much even for Dee trout, and the wind was nearly north and biting beyond belief, and I have never yet heard of a north-wind river. We did not enjoy ourselves even when the air cleared of snow, but we were virtually committed to our long voyage, as you cannot retrace your steps in a coracle on the Dee. But when, after three congealed hours with some half a dozen indifferent fish in the basket, we paused for lunch at Rhiawl rocks beneath the foot of Gamelin, then a vast sheet of snow, we both agreed that human endurance could no longer hold out against the icy blast. The coracle was thereupon thrust into a thicket and we parted, each on our long weary trudge, Griffith down river to Llangollen, I to the distant fireside of The Grouse inn and home that night, where I was confined to bed for the next two or three days with a bad chill on the liver. Griffith survived that arctic voyage, but soon afterwards fell from a high rock by the river and broke his neck. He tied flies commendably, and had a touching faith that with any other brand the fisher on the Dee was quite inadequately equipped. In his snug parlour at Llangollen, with its low oak-ribbed ceiling, seated in the deep-set window amid his furs and feathers, his paddle hung over the chimney-piece, his old wife knitting by the fire, and the grandfather clock ticking away their few remaining years, he made the centre of a picture that still abides with me.

From a high cliff in that famous Shropshire park of the last chapter where the pike were raided, a group of bold shadowy heights used to be pointed out to visitors as the vale of Llangollen, name of mellifluous

sound and vale of infinite beauty. I remember how melodiously it rung in my boyish ears, stirring its elementary sense of the music and cadence of words, blended doubtless with one's earliest glimpse into the then mysterious mountains of North Wales. And my kind hostess used to tell me of the two famous old ladies whom as a girl she had known intimately, and indeed it was only the other day I was reading some old letters from them to her. A mental picture of the vale of Llangollen fixed itself then and there in my mind, as such things do, and stuck in it till, twenty and odd years later, I discovered that the original infinitely exceeded the vale of my dreams.

The Dee roars finely over the great rock ledges above Bishop Trevor's fifteenth-century bridge in the heart of the little town. The encompassing mountains and the high, shining, limestone ridges of the Eglwyseg and the woody steeps, the bosky glens that come down from this side and from that, are Nature's contribution to this enchanting vale. And of memories what a crowd for those who happily can feel them in this very gateway of North Wales. Abbey and manor-house, castle and battlefield, the footprints of kings and princes, monks and bards, lie everywhere. And in the centre of the high encircling hills, perched on a sharp green sugar-loaf many hundred feet above the town and river, are the fang-like splintered ruins of the ancient fortress of the chieftains of Powys and their successors, the proud race of Trevor :—

> Relic of kings, wreck of forgotten wars;
> To the winds abandoned and the prying stars.

So sang Wordsworth, though more susceptible, perhaps, to the shepherd's cot than to relics of the mailed fist. Indeed he incurred, it is said, the displeasure of his hostesses, the aristocratic old ladies of Plas-Newydd, by apostrophising that picturesque, half-timbered abode as 'a lowly cot by Deva's banks.' Dinas Brân is not surpassed for pose and significance among the great hill fortresses of Wales, though the last note of its mediæval story comes to us, not from an epic but from a lovelorn bard—a man, too, of fame and note. And it was Myfanwy Trevor, the beauty of the castle in the fifteenth century who broke all hearts upon the Dee, that invoked the stanzas of this famous one among her victims, Gutyn Owen :—

The winds around thy towers may rave,
  But there I roam thy form to see,
As brilliant as the dangerous wave
  That murmurs o'er Caswennon's sea.

My song shall tell the world how bright
  Is she who robs my soul of rest;
As fair her face, all smiles and light,
  As snow new fallen on Arran's crest.

So much for a sample in English of Gutyn's impassioned outpouring, a man who, though lovelorn for a brief hour, admits elsewhere his partiality for a good horse and a good dinner, and smacks his poetic lips over the hospitalities of his neighbours the monks. For in a glen at the mountain foot hard by, in the vale of the pillar of Eliseg, are the stately ruins of the great abbey of Valle Crucis, beneath whose turf-clad, roofless aisles lies the dust of the Powys princes, who

founded it and strove or temporised through the ages with the ever-pushing Norman.

I have said a good deal of the coracle because it is a strange and unknown craft. But most of my days and hours upon the Dee have been expended not upon its streams but battling a-foot with its outrageously rugged bottom. The trout come early here into condition and are forward in taking the fly, though more capricious than most, probably from the amount of bottom feed to which they give themselves almost wholly over comparatively early in the season. It is admittedly less interesting to fish a big river across and down than to work a smaller one up stream. There is unavoidably a good deal of what may be called the salmon-fishing method about it, with its inevitable touch of monotony. But it is after all a change from the other, and that to me is one of the charms of trouting. Moreover in the Glyndyfrdwy water, over which we have just been in fancy drifting, there is very little of that regular alternation of stream and pool which distinguishes the Dee as it sweeps down from Bala through the green vale of Edeyrnion to Corwen and Carrog. On the contrary, it is much broken and impeded by rocks and ledges, and forced by the rugged road it has to travel into a constant variety of shifting water and changing depths. All this has labelled it dangerous, and at any rate it is extremely arduous wading. It is assuredly not every one's water. Wading is one of the minor arts of fishing, and if either unused to it or physically unhandy, it is beyond doubt in such waters extremely hazardous. Swimmer or no swimmer, if you slither into a deep

pool in waders and brogues you are more likely than not to remain at the bottom of it. It is bad enough to sit suddenly down in cold April water up to the third button of your waistcoat, though only problematically injurious. On the other hand you are here quite certain to do this occasionally, whereas the other *faux pas* you would probably not have a chance of making twice.

Quite recently I revisited the Dee after a long lapse of years. Of course it was a trifle melancholy; such things always are. The ripple of water over stones sings many tunes, or rather touches many chords —the sad, the soothing, and the gay, but it is always terribly reminiscent. It will bring back your boyhood, if you have always been a fisherman, with a realism that nothing else can approach. It will recall the forms, the faces, and the voices of the departed with whom it has (for you) been once associated with painful clarity. I was not harrowed quite thus far upon the Dee. For though Evan, Rhys, and Griffith were among the shadows, they awakened kindly rather than tearful memories. But on the other hand, there are more important things you may forget, as I discovered to my cost. One of these lapses caused merely disappointment, the other gave me the worst ducking I have ever had in the Dee. The day after I arrived in the first week of April a cold east wind blew shrilly over shrivelled waters. An impossible outlook by all ordinary trouting estimates, into which last I had relapsed by constant intercourse with other and more normal streams in spring. So I felt annoyed to have thus fallen upon such evil times. But I went out of

course the first day, and moreover killed, to my surprise, quite a fair basket. Then of a sudden came the freshet that everybody said the river so badly needed, and after its abatement balmy zephyrs blew from the south-west, the sun gleamed out, and the joyous promise of spring was in the air. Two or three fishermen arrived, and everybody, even I who should have known better, joined the chorus of 'what perfect weather and what perfect water.' And then we all cast our flies through these perfect days on the perfect water, and regularly returned at even with about a quarter of an average basket, to spend the time from dinner till bed trying to solve this fiendish mystery. At least they did, being strangers. For myself, I began to remember the mysterious ways of the sacred stream.

It was in the prime of one of these exasperating days, and I was pressing along a fearfully rugged bottom under a thickly wooded shore, merely because I had always done so in years past in order to fish the top of a favourite pool. Indeed I had already made a cast or two upon it, not a little hampered, as always, by over-spreading boughs. On looking across to the other shore it suddenly occurred to me what a fool I was. For over yonder were nice, open, flat ledges of dry, or barely covered rock along the bank, with not a tree near. Surely, thought I, the river must be unfordable in the shallows just above, though it didn't look it, and it didn't prove so, and I reached the other shore with ease. I then marvelled why it was I had always laboured that pool from the other bank. The ledges on this one sloped very gradually,

almost imperceptibly, into quite shallow water, whence I could obviously command much of the great seething pool. So I proceeded with all the usual circumspection of an habitual wader into the shallow water which covered the smooth floor. In a moment both heels went up and I slithered right in. Not into the pool, thank heaven, but into about three feet of water at its edge. And even as I went down the memory of the past flashed through my brain, and before I reached a sitting position, up to my chin this time, I knew precisely why it was that I had always fished the pool from the other shore with all its difficulties. I am no geologist, but those particular slabs had a coat of glass upon them that the most recently nailed of brogues could not possibly have gripped. I had known this well in former days from some only less harrowing experience, but the fact had flown somehow from the brain cell in which it was stored, to my complete undoing. As I was scrambling out, a chill and miserable object, the keeper turned up. But that was of no use. Neither his eloquent sympathy nor his clothes were any good to me. Despite his forcible protestations I emptied my waders of water and went on fishing, though I suppose I should have known a great deal better at my time of life. But no harm came of it, and I always have had a stout faith in the innocuous qualities of trout-holding water. I never caught a cold in my life through getting wet out fishing.

There are both pike (unfortunately) as well as grayling in the Dee; also salmon and sea-trout in their season. Upon the former, handsome and shapely

specimens of their unwelcome kind, though they be, owners and committees wage more or less constant war. The grayling here does not pay for his keep. He will take your trout-fly occasionally in spring, when he is of course out of condition, but for some mysterious reason does not rise after the fashion of his kind in autumn, when you want him to. Some worm fishers may, for aught I know, take toll of the Dee grayling. In years agone I remember a little Yorkshireman who used to spend his September holiday in their pursuit, wading up the half mile straight of smooth gravelly glide that follows the salmon pool under the noble old bridge at Corwen. He had not, I think, great sport, but he got enough to keep his family by his own account on a regular grayling diet during their holiday, which must have sorely cloyed them, unless they all shared his own enthusiasm for their edible qualities. For himself, he used to say he devoured them 'roomp, stoomp, and 'ead.' I do not go that far with him, though a grayling in condition is a palatable fish. The sea trout which jumped the weir above Llangollen and ran up in great quantities were still more eccentric and were scarcely ever taken with a rod. The salmon came up, sparsely in spring, but in fair numbers with the autumn floods, and rose reasonably through the 'back end,' though not often in very good condition. Still, salmon-fishing was a time-honoured institution on the Dee. Every pool patronised by the king of fishes, from Corwen to Llangollen, had its name, with sundry tall stories attached to each. Many anglers came, and for the most part with their families, who led the simple life in

quaint old farmhouses and other equally primitive but less decorative abodes of Welsh-speaking natives. So now, of course, the jerry-builder has been at work. Looking up from the old bridge of Llansaintffraid, where all was once foliage and grey roof, there is now the garish and exotic glow of new red brick. What was formerly a small village with an inn, a shop, a post office, a schoolhouse, a church, a vicarage, a blacksmith and a bard is now an obvious competitor on a small scale for the holiday visitor from Lancashire and the Midlands. Since those days, however, the salmon-fishing has greatly improved.

But Llansaintffraid, otherwise Carrog, is really a place of high renown, concerning which something should be said. For myself I owe more than I can tell to the inspiration of the *genius loci* absorbed during long days and weeks spent there or thereabouts upon the Dee. This was actually the ancestral patrimony and the home—one of two, that is to say, quite near together—of the immortal 'Damned Glendower.' His property, inherited through varying fortunes, not vital to these light pages, from his princely ancestors of Powys, extended, speaking broadly, from Corwen to Llangollen. In the old Welsh divisions it constituted the whole commote of Glyndyfrdwy. Indeed, the great patriot and chieftain's true and actual name, when he was at home among people that could pronounce it, was Owain of Glyndyfrdwy. This was too much even for some of his Welsh friends who lived in far counties, and he naturally became Glyndwr. His English enemies and contemporaries ran, of course, hopelessly amuck; the nearest they ever achieved

when striving to be accurate and punctilious, was Owen de Glendourdy. Usually they anathematised him in their military dispatches and suchlike simply as 'Glindor.' The Welsh frequently omit the particle in this connection, though much addicted to place-names, even to that of humble cottages, owing, of course, to the tautology of their patronymics. Our English Smith may emblazon his four-roomed villa in a terrace as Chatsworth or Hurstmonceaux, instead of more sensibly giving it a number. But no one save the postman pays any attention to such aspirations. Certainly the town does not speak or think of him as 'Smith of Hurstmonceaux.' But in Wales it is different. Mrs. Jones, who has labelled her modest jerry-built cot Byrn-Hafod, is known to the full extent she is known at all and spoken of invariably as Mrs. Jones Bryn-Hafod, which has a fine aristocratic ring, though nothing of that sort is intended.

Now, a little way below Carrog, a cone-shaped tumulus rises high above the river bank crowned with half a dozen ancient ruddy-stemmed Scotch firs. It looks right down the Dee, and is so cunningly placed that, in spite of many intervening bends of the valley and of folding hills, it commands full view of the high-perched ruins of Dinas Brân seven miles away. It is doubtless prehistoric, and its signalling advantages as against enemies coming up the Dee, were probably appreciated by its prehistoric raisers. They must have been invaluable, however, in the later Anglo-Welsh wars. It may or may not have been for this that Glyndwr's mansion was planted at its foot,

though every trace of it but the upheaval of the turf has vanished. Not so, however, some of the relics of the chieftain. The little prison house, where for long periods he immured certain notable captives, is still standing in the village, inhabited when I last saw it by an aged crone. To this day it is known as *cachardy Owain* (Owen's prison house), a mere cottage, and, I should imagine, one of the oldest in the kingdom. The ancient little church is the same in which the hero no doubt attended Mass, while the venerable farmhouse beside the bridge is stoutly held by tradition, a thing not to be despised among these long-memoried people, to have been the site at any rate of Glyndwr's farm buildings. An oak table is still treasured in a neighbouring homestead as a relic of the manor-house that once stood here above the Dee. A field below is still known as the 'Parliament Field,' where the men of the valley presumably met their leader in council. Not far to the north is the strip of upland which, as a cause of disputed ownership between Owen and Lord Grey, the powerful Anglo-Norman baron of the vale of Clwyd, led to the armed raid which made a rebel of Glyndwr. Hitherto he had been a loyal subject and a polished gentleman familiar with the English Court. This little boundary dispute provoked a war that for many years decimated Wales, harried the border counties, and brought in a French army, inured Henry v. at an early age, *pace* Shakespeare, to arduous campaigns (he destroyed with his own hand this very house of Owen's), and undoubtedly worried the king his father into a premature grave. All this may seem irrelevant. But it was fishing,

day after day, occasionally for salmon, mostly for trout, beneath the fir-crowned up-lifted tumulus, beneath which the wide waters of the mound pool surged so temptingly, that filled me with strange longings to gather something tangible of the indomitable warrior who lived at its foot and owned the ancestors of the trout and salmon that drew me thither. It seemed odd that the Welsh who all over the country invoked the hero as a sort of patron saint knew only a few odd tags and legends about him; a man, too, living and laying about him as he did within quite measurable time.

As the years went on, and the old tags went on, and Welsh patriots of the political and pulpit type grew more and more eloquent of the past greatness and glories of Wales, hidden from the scoffing Saxon, and but little understood, I fear, by most of themselves, the real Owen still remained hardly more than a shadow. The Glyndwr of Shakespeare still held the field! He was on every local patriot's tongue, but none of them seemed to want to know anything further about a man so well worth knowing. The Dee valley folk were only certain that he was born in Corwen; though, as a matter of fact, he was born by chance in Pembrokeshire, his mother being a lady of South Wales. The mark of his dagger, at any rate, flung in a fit of petulance from the mountain-top above, was, and still is, to be seen by the faithful on the wall of Corwen church. Owen was almost as shadowy a figure in the Principality as Merlin, though as real and as recent a one as Henry v. himself, and paramount in Wales for years. Every county had

its little trace of him, some fragment of story or legend to tell. But they were for the most part quite disconnected.

To cut short my story, the voice of the Dee sounded, or seemed to sound, the name of its hero so insistently in my ears, the romantic beauty of the vale seemed to harmonise so perfectly with the romance of the great chieftain's elusive personality, that after about ten years the impulse to rescue him from something like obscurity had grown too strong. In short, as I took down my rod one evening by Glyndwr's mount, I determined to write his life, if sufficient material could be found for it, and if any publisher could be induced to see eye to eye with me. Two or three eminent firms, who were inclined to look kindly on any reasonable suggestion of mine, laughed the notion of Owen out of court at once. I was then advised to approach one of those houses where many editors of a less distinguished type lurk in various little rooms while the roar of printing machinery turns out popular stuff by the acre. It reminded me of a shoe factory. I was shown into one of these bare little rooms dedicated, as I was told, to the 'historical department.' Here a strange-looking wight with a blue chin and attired like an American politician seemed but meagrely equipped with a small table and a bedroom chair. It was not in the least like such editors' rooms as I was already familiar with. When I broached the subject the departmental editor sagely stroked his blue chin and tapped the top of a prematurely bald head with a puzzled air. 'Yes,' said he very sententiously, and I give his precise words, 'I think I have come across

the gentleman's name in some of my researches This was enough and more than enough.

Ultimately the late Dr. Evelyn Abbot of Oxford, then editing for Messrs. Putnam their 'Heroes of Nations' series, took a different, and, as it proved, a shrewder view of my representations. And the Anglo-American publishing house have not, I am happy to say, had cause to regret it. In forecasting a popular subject the publisher is generally right and the enthusiastic author generally wrong, but there are exceptions, and this was one. It was not to be expected, however, that eminent publishers should know very much about the mysterious heart of Wales and its unproven attitude towards the biography of a national hero. Perhaps I didn't know a very great deal, but I knew more than they did, though they would not believe it. I did misdoubt however, and naturally, the native attitude towards the intrusion of a Sassenach into this holy of holies though they had shirked it themselves. But in this I did an injustice to a generous people, for nothing could have been nicer than the way in which this little offering of an alien to their national literature was accepted by scholars, professors, antiquarians, and schoolmasters, as well as by the unlearned masses. Even New Englanders and Pennsylvanians were persuaded by Messrs. Putnam to take an interest in Owen. So all was well and more than well.

And all this came about from fishing, communicated, so to speak, by the trout of Owen's own river, and the atmosphere which, thanks no doubt to the magical personality which all contemporary England believed

could 'call spirits from the vasty deep,' broods over the spot. As for myself, it engendered an interest in everything pertaining to the romantic part of what is always to me the most physically delectable of the three kingdoms of the island of Britain. The Welsh, though always purposing, have never achieved a national monument to the strongest and most magnetic personality of all their ancient history.[1] Perhaps the preachers are fearful lest its martial significance should encourage recruiting in His Majesty's forces, which to them is anathema. The soul of a soldier they believe to be irretrievably lost. The best monument to the hero after all is the group of aged fir-trees on the high tump above the Dee at Carrog, bordering both the Holyhead road and the Great Western Railway, where the impetuous waters of the sacred river play the same accompaniment, no doubt, as they piped to the harp of the Red Iolo, Owen's bard, as he sounded his patron's praises in verse, which we may read to-day.

[1] Owen's 'Parliament House' at Machynlleth has been totally restored and dedicated to his memory.

## III

## SOME WILTSHIRE MEMORIES

IF you touch on Wiltshire fishing nowadays you are expected to be serious! Nature has linked the county with Hampshire, and Hampshire fishing in literature is a portentously solemn affair. To crack jokes or look about you is accounted, I take it, as mere foolishness, and to expect an entertaining aboriginal upon the bank would, I fancy, be futile. Unlike those of the north and west the rustics of the chalk counties know little or nothing of trout-fishing, and care less, though they hang betimes on the bridges and watch the big fish, so conspicuous in these clear chalk streams, with the same detached interest they might exhibit towards pheasants feeding on a stubble. And the great trout ignore them with a complacent contempt which would astonish the timid quarter-pounder of a Welsh brook, who dashes for his life on any attempt at such familiarity. If you didn't know better you might almost assume that they were easy to catch, just as the Cockney scribe, moved to satiric diatribes at the sight of hand-reared pheasants and oblivious to the rest of the programme, thinks it must be child's play to shoot them.

Wiltshire, from this point of view, means the upper

Kennet, the Salisbury Avon, and the Wylie, together with some tributaries and little brooks less known to fame. Like the Hampshire rivers these are nowadays, I think, mainly fished by Londoners and aliens with well-lined pockets. The country parson, the doctor, the schoolmaster, the rural tradesman, the village blacksmith has no interest, not even a detached one, in trout, and it is altogether another country in this respect from North and West Britain. The man who cuts the weeds or attends to the hatches in the water meadows and, for still more obvious reasons, the miller, are on speaking terms with the fish, but have no scientific interest in a craft that neither they nor their belongings have ever had anything to do with. There are here no aboriginal fly-casters or fly-tiers, or deadly men with a running worm. In spite of its beautiful streams Wiltshire might almost be Norfolk or Suffolk so far as the local atmosphere is concerned. These things are, and always were, for 'the gentles,' and mainly nowadays gentles from London and other foreign parts—well, perhaps not altogether on the higher parts of the streams. Local interest still lingers about the less coveted reaches: the parson, the doctor, a big farmer or two, or even a leading tradesman, reserve their privileges, cultivate the art of the dry fly, talk fishing betimes in the market-place, and give a little local flavour to the business.

I hardly know what happened to these Wiltshire chalk streams generally before the introduction of the dry-fly method, though I was reared on one. But I do know, as may have been gathered from the first chapter, that the fish had no sort of objection to a

wet fly—nay nor yet to two of them—fished across and down when the wind served that way. It makes my blood run cold to think that I have landed on occasions, when revisiting the scenes of youth, four, five, or even six brace of good fish on the Mildenhall water of the Kennet in that dastard fashion. But then I didn't know any better, though in the early eighties perhaps I should have. About the same time a great friend of mine, who, though very keen, was a most indifferent fisherman, even with wet fly, killed ten brace on one occasion by the same reprehensible method in the half mile of water just below the town of Marlborough, and that meant about five-and-twenty pounds weight. He never showed the least contrition to his dying day for the many fish he had taken out of the river with two wet flies, nor could I ever induce him to see eye to eye with me and agree that both of us, he particularly, as a perpetual resident, ought to look back almost with shame upon those many pleasant days among the water meadows below Savernake forest, some of which we had enjoyed together. But then he never consorted with dry-fly men or even read them. They hadn't yet got up so high as Marlborough, and it was impossible for me at second hand to depict to my old friend, and one withal so much my senior, the stony eye with which the dry-fly purist in his first decades of exaltation regarded the 'Chuck and Chancer,' and the opprobrious names he called him.

He has got steadily purer and drier ever since, to be sure, but I think there is a better understanding now between the two schools. It was upon the Avon, a dozen miles away, in the vale of Pewsey, some thirty

years ago, that I got my first shock. It was a bright sunny day, I well remember, and just before the first hatch of mayfly was due. There was no breeze stirring, and, after I had fished the two or three short interludes of quick stream unsuccessfully, I was seated in rather hopeless mood beside a long stretch of glassy water, perhaps eighteen inches deep, and disconsolately whistling for a wind. From my belated standpoint the day was assuming a more and more impossible aspect, when all at once a strange angler broke upon my solitude.

As it was obvious we must both be friends of the owner we naturally forgathered. I was magnanimous enough to feel sorry for him, as well as for myself, as he had come even farther than I had. Indeed I was looking at the spot only the other day; the white-railed bridge over the clear, gliding, little river, the tall Lombardy poplars swaying above the old water-mill, a bow shot to the left, the long fir-tufted billows of Salisbury Plain cutting the southern sky, the bolder ramparts of Oare and Martinsell rising fainter to the north. But the stranger didn't seem at all depressed. When he had put his rod together he sat down beside me, lit his pipe, and remarked that we could see a fish rise as well there as anywhere. As we could see the bottom for fifty yards, the remark struck me as irrelevant, as was the prospect of a rising fish unlikely, even had there been just then any fly on the water.

When he had finished his pipe and no sign appeared, he knocked the ashes out and said he would go up a bit and see if he could spot a fish lying in this looking-

THE WILTSHIRE AVON AT AMESBURY

glass stretch. This struck me as a mere natural history expedition, harmless enough in itself but with no bearing at all on the business we were out for. So off he went stealthily up the river bank for about a stone's-throw, then suddenly stopped and beckoned to me, whereupon I proceeded, also stealthily, towards him. 'There 's one,' he said, 'just to the left of that dark bit of weed,' pointing to a mark about thirty yards away. 'Don't you see him?' Now I should have been no little huffed had I been told I couldn't see a fish in the water as well as the average angler, but like the latter I had never gone in for trout-stalking as an art, and I had to confess I couldn't. He was a little impatient at this, so after a few seconds I basely dissembled and pretended I could. 'Will you try him or shall I?' I didn't at the moment know that I had one of the best fishermen in Wiltshire at my elbow. But if I had known him to be the worst, I should have handed him over the job with pleasure. Hunting up your fish before you caught them seemed utterly subversive of every article of the angler's creed as I till then had known it. Moreover the essay in that shallow, transparent water, to say nothing of the length of line required, seemed mere foolishness. I had always fancied I could throw an ordinarily decent line, and had followed in wet-fly fishing the 'fine and far off' method with assiduity and conviction. Undoubtedly I could lay out as long a one as is ever requisite in quick waters or on a chalk stream with a ripple of a wind, or again I could pitch one handily between boughs or under roots — a good deal of extra schooling in North American forest streams had

conduced to this. But my new friend's performance was a revelation and his floating fly was another, for I must ask the reader again to remember that this was thirty years ago. Well, he got that fish, and then he spotted another and got that, and then another, and secured that one too. We had then reached the mill, where we had our lunch and a pipe and some illuminating conversation. My companion now realised my benighted condition, and I learned for the first time that things had been happening on the chalk streams, though they hadn't yet struck the upper Kennet on which for three or four days in the year I cast my two wet flies with tolerable success and perfect satisfaction, as I have already intimated.

It is quite certain that the trout there at any rate had not yet become disabused of their absurd old-fashioned notions. I don't think they have wholly abandoned them even yet in spite of London syndicates whose members, when they think no one is looking, often fish a wet fly down stream, for I have myself seen them at it. But in those days, before the syndicates, there was a glorious interlude, after the old marquis, alluded to in the first chapter, excellent man, but absent-minded about fishing, was laid in the vaults of his fathers. For another marquis succeeded, who somehow realised, good soul as he was, that three or four miles of as excellent trouting as there was in England was intended by providence to be enjoyed. So any local angler, past or present, of which there were then mighty few, was treated very handsomely. With another regime came still worse times in agriculture, and with them the alien syndicates or their

equivalents, more or less all down the river, and the local angler mourned. As an ex-local I enjoyed that year, among others, the usual liberty upon the Kennet, with the further privilege, always thoughtfully accorded, of taking a friend. My professor of the Avon jumped at the opportunity of joining me in the latter capacity, as was very natural, and we had another day together on the Mildenhall water.

Now every traveller on the Bath road must know the hill-top where, emerging from Savernake forest, you first catch sight of Marlborough lying below, at the foot of a mile-long steady slope, down which the coach-drivers of former days used betimes to terrify their fares by making up a lost five minutes. The sight of the old town with its red roofs, its two hoary church towers, and the beautiful spire of the school chapel in the background, lying snugly in its green trough with the waste of downland spreading into space behind, is the best thing yet in all the seventy-seven miles from London. For you sweep just here out of the cramped country, out of the stuffy home counties into the glorious downland that rolls away towards the glorious west, the noble beeches of Savernake making a fitting portal for such an advent. Glistening brightly out of the old town as you cross the rubicon and descend the hill comes the Kennet, coiling through the water meadows and slipping down from mill to mill by Polton, Mildenhall, Stitchcombe, and Axford on its way to Ramsbury and Littlecote. Here my new friend, the professor, had a further opportunity of demonstrating this new art to my discomfiture, and incidentally to my enlighten-

ment. For it was another warm and windless day. The quick glides where the fish sometimes rose well to the wet fly and even the swirling tails of the lashers were irresponsive. The still waters were like glass unruffled by the faintest puff. So the dry-fly expert had all the fun and I, not altogether unprofitably, a good deal of looking on.

They are better and larger trout, too, than those of the upper Avon, which are white of flesh and far less palatable, in spite of a fair supply of mayfly, none of which hatch out higher up the Kennet than Ramsbury. But the Kennet trout, mostly of a pound or a bit over—those that rise, that is to say, for there are monsters in the water—are firm and usually pink-fleshed, and for chalk-stream trout the best of eating. In the mayfly season lower down, at Ramsbury, Littlecote, and on into Berkshire by Hungerford and Kintbury bigger fish than pounders, of course, are taken. In the commoners' water at Hungerford, which, on account of their municipal privileges, is alone in the chalk counties, so far as I know, a town of fishermen, huge trout have been taken on a minnow and even fly within my memory. Doubtless they are taken still. Ten and eleven-pounders were at least annual events. I believe, as a matter of fact, the Kennet is recognised as having the largest record of heavy trout in the kingdom. But we didn't catch these sockdolagers either with a sedge or Wickham dry, or an alder and blue dun wet, about Marlborough —not much! The miller's net mentioned in a previous chapter used to scoop out an occasional whale or two of five or six pounds, and no doubt a live minnow,

had it been a permissible or popular bait in the upper waters, would have accounted for some surprising fish. The little river Og, which runs into the Kennet just below Marlborough and, three or four miles up, shrivels to a winter bourne, dry as a board in summer-time, while its lower streams are stiff with weed, the old keeper used to declare held even larger fish than the Kennet.

I never fished a Wiltshire stream again after that day with a wet fly, though my days upon them, it should be said, have been only occasional ones. This was not from any particular enthusiasm or predilection for the dry fly as a cult, for the rough water streams and everything connected with them bind me to them with an infinitely stronger tie. You can fish parts of these last, to be sure, if you like, with a dry fly; but there is no great excess of art and no special difficulty in this case, and usually you would not kill so many fish as with two wet flies requiring quite as much skill of a rather different kind. But in the comparatively still and more monotonous surface of the chalk stream it is quite different. For myself, I surrendered in a single day. It seemed obvious that for waters like this the new style—though I believe on the Test it had been going some time—was the right thing. There really *was* something of the 'chuck and chance it' reproach attached to the old wet-fly fishing of these chalk streams. The phrase, it would be charitable to think, was coined by persons who knew no others, and then echoed by a thousand fools who knew very little of any rivers, wet or dry, and applied it indiscriminately. Nor had there been, I am sure, any-

thing like the same amount of fishing on the chalk streams in the old wet-fly days, and what there had been was, I fancy, mainly local.

At any rate whenever on a Wiltshire stream after this I always followed the dry fly scrupulously and to the best of my very moderate ability. Sometimes, to be sure, if I couldn't beguile a rising fish with the orthodox presentation I have given him a wet fly and got him. But that was the fish's look out. He was supposed to be in a sufficiently advanced stage of education as to be above taking a wet fly, so it was high time he was superannuated. Once, on an odd day in September, kindly conceded me on the sacred waters of the Wilton Club, upon the Wylie, I killed, I blush to say, four rising graylings, one after the other, with a wet fly, though not until in each case I had presented it dry and tastily at least a score of times to each without avail. This preliminary was only due, as a mere matter of common courtesy, to a corporation whose privileges I was enjoying. For the man who would deliberately fish the Wylie Club water with a wet fly would probably shoot a fox. I have read of such men in what may be called the criminal columns of the sporting papers, and felt glad that I did not stand in their shoes. The four graylings weighed nearly seven pounds and were far the largest sequence of that graceful fish that have ever fallen to my rod. This, no doubt, because I have scarcely ever fished for chalk-stream grayling, and the other sort with which I am on easy terms don't weigh up like that.

But in regard to fish refusing a quite nicely cooked

fly and then taking it wet, the biggest I ever killed upon the upper Kennet came to grass that way, and through no fault whatever of mine, but purely by reason of its own incredible, inconceivable stupidity. I remarked in my first chapter that all my fish adventures occurred in early youth and that I never had another, but I had forgotten this one. The others appealed straight to what might be called the gallery, sisters, cousins, aunts—anybody. There were not six people in Marlborough, however, to whom the last adventure would have had any meaning whatsoever beyond the not very startling fact that I had an extra good fish in my basket. It was the largest, to be sure, that had ever been killed above the town with fly. But then being only two pounds and a quarter, and many much bigger ones than that swimming habitually about in the Kennet, this would be a mere detail, interesting only to the local craftsman. I did not, I blush to say, disclose to any of the half-dozen how I caught it except that it was upon a small Wickham, which was true and of no significance whatever, for, as this was only half a dozen years ago, dry fly had long been there the order of the day. I merely sent the fish to my old friend, the owner of the water, with my love, as it was in beautiful condition. I was torn, in fact, between reluctance to spoil gratuitously my little triumph and my desire to unfold a strange tale. So I compromised by enjoying the first at the moment and then unfolding the details a year later. And this is what happened, for the benefit more particularly of dry-fly, chalk-stream readers.

Now there are only about two miles of fishing above

Marlborough, and then the river, as so frequently happens in the higher waters of chalk streams, begins to squander itself in shallow, gravelly trickles among cresses and subaqueous vegetation, though for some distance farther there are occasional small hatch-holes where monsters lurk ready and anxious, so I have been told by a friend who has tried it, to take a natural minnow directly it touches the water. But there are only two miles, at the most, of fly water above the town, and in it the surface-feeding fish run smaller and are less numerous than in the larger waters and greater preserves below. The upper half of this stretch, however, the very topmost fishable bit of the river in short, had afforded me many a pleasant hour when a lad in the bad, old, wet-fly days, and a good many brace of three-quarter-pounders picked up in odd hours. On the occasion in question I had not trod these particular banks with a rod for nearly thirty years. A generation of fly-fishers and dry ones, of course, had grown up even on this little stretch of water since then. Every one who has been to Marlborough knows it well, that reach along the foot of the old churchyard at Preshute, past the foot of Preshute house garden, under the arched bridge, and for a couple of meadows beyond towards Manton. It was a lovely June afternoon, and I had gone down about tea-time, and in those half-pleasant, half-painful memories that the waters of youth so vividly stimulate had spent a quiet hour or two on the once familiar stretches, but had only basketed one just sizeable fish, as there was practically no rise on. There was still, however, the pet spot of my wet-fly youth remaining, and that was

where the current, after gliding under the brick bridge of the drive up to Preshute house, runs with a bit of life in it against the low walled-up end of the garden, where two small bushes, the very same ones as of old, no whit altered, sprout out of the masonry and hang slightly over the water. This had been almost the only fishable spot, except the hatch-hole, in the wet-fly period when the breeze dropped on the whole half mile of otherwise still water. It was a rare place in any case for fish to lie, and there was at least one average-sized trout there on this occasion.

Whether I could merely spot him or whether he rose I forget, but I tried him long and patiently, though to no purpose, with a small sedge from the meadow bank opposite. It was simple fishing and easily covered, the only drawback, as of old, being the bridge immediately above, liable at any minute to be occupied by passing schoolboys, for Preshute is the most outlying of the school boarding-houses, and if a fisherman chanced to be at work, a natural curiosity pulled every wayfarer up short at the parapet, and away down stream went the trout into the weeds below. A bevy of boys did me this dis-service now, and if only my coy three-quarter-pounder had sailed down I should merely have reeled up and gone home without annoyance, as time and a dinner engagement pressed. But to my astonishment a great big fish, very big indeed to be waiting there in that eminently surface-feeding spot, went down with him. My pulse beat a bit faster as I felt I had been fishing over such a prize, for I had searched with my fly the whole ten yards or so of brisk water under the wall on spec. I guessed,

however, he would be back in five minutes, for the old custom of the fish below that bridge if it were left in peace came back to me as an open book. So I sat down, changed my fly for a small Wickham and waited, and sure enough back he came into the feeding spot, though I could not see exactly where he took up his position. It wasn't very promising under the circumstances, nor did it prove so, for I tried the little run over again to the best of my skill and care without response, and then as the school and town clocks across the water meadows were ringing out for me, urgent notes, I proceeded to wind up without more ado. It was now this strange thing happened. For as my Wickham came jerking up out of the three-foot water into the clear shallow of no depth at all which sloped up towards my feet I beheld to my astonishment my lusty friend heading straight for me. For a brief moment I failed to realise that he could be making such an inconceivable ass of himself, as events proved, and merely thought it strange that an unusually large fish should come out into shallow, gin-clear water on a sandy bottom merely to pay his respects. All this, as the novelists say, occurred in less time than it takes to tell. But the incredible truth struck me somehow that he was actually following my fly, of which the very hook and tinsel was plain enough even to my eye, so I trailed it slowly towards me in six inches of shallow water, till looking me practically in the face, not four yards from where I stood, I saw the white of my friend's gills as his mouth opened. As he closed it I struck, and though I could scarcely credit my senses, so impossible seemed

the whole business, I had him firm. At the same moment a score of flannelled cricketers homeward-bound swarmed on to the bridge. I was only just in time!

And then ensued a great fight, the only really exhilarating contest I ever remember to have had with a chalk-stream fish. There were hopeless banks of weeds—indeed the river was a solid mass of them just below the open run, and the cast was of drawn gut. Again and again the fish dashed for the shelter, and as often it seemed a very touch-and-go whether my cast would hold. The gathering company upon the bridge, lusty sons perhaps, some of them, of my ancient schoolfellows, manifested great excitement. Some of them jumped into the meadow, which was strictly out of bounds, and at least three of them wanted to net the fish for me when he was at last beaten. Not knowing the state of their temperature or the extent of their fish-lore I took no such risks. Most of us have seen an excited schoolboy as well as an unsophisticated grown-up making perilous play with a landing-net. The trout scaled, as already noted, just two pounds and a quarter when I got home. He was a beautiful thick Kennet fish, in the very pink of condition, and my old friend the doctor, and owner of the water, said he cut as red as a salmon on the table. But I never could have believed it to be within the wildest bounds of possibility that such a trout, or indeed any trout, could slowly and deliberately make such an astounding fool of himself. And he was the largest, too, ever taken on a fly above Marlborough!

In the crack waters of the chalk streams the weeds are of course kept regularly cut, and as some think, to the detriment of the breeding haunts of the natural fly. It seems tolerably certain that on some much-pampered waters the insect supply has declined, and indeed new stock has been actually introduced. The pedigree of the trout themselves in some of those rivers must by this time be pretty intricate. It would puzzle a Wylie fish, I imagine, to locate his grandparents, and we may fairly assume that exotic trout may be seen on many club waters rising at imported flies. When the weeds have got ahead and form big patches about the water, they offer great possibilities to the fighting fish if he can get into them. With only one fly, as in dry-fly fishing, the angler has reasonable possibilities of getting him out. In wet-fly fishing with two or three hooks, as happens occasionally in lakes, one's only chance is to haul the kicking captive willy-nilly, and chance a rupture, over the top of the bed and net him instantly and anyhow, without regard to the proprieties. A chalk-stream fish who thoroughly understands weeds, however, has a useful trick of holding on to the stalks below water with the grip of his teeth, and then you may haul away till you break, or he gets tired of it, or rubs the fly out.

A day or two after the adventure at Preshute bridge I was mayfly-fishing on the Avon at Chisenbury, just where that pretty little river enters the Plain. There were some thick patches of weeds about, and a trout hooked at the edge of one of them was a little too quick for me, and fixed himself down in the very

heart of it. After the usual amount of pressure, without any result, and not knowing whether the fish was still on it or I was merely fast in the weeds, I thought I would at least save my cast, and at the same time quench my thirst, for the fish were not doing much, and it was a very hot day. So I laid down my rod and wa'ked to the village, nearly half a mile away, where I secured a long bean-pole from a cottage garden. On my return I raised my rod with one hand and probed the depths of the weeds with the other. Whereupon, to my surprise, out came the fish on to the top of the bed, when I gave him the shortest shrift and had him in the net before he had time to take in the situation.

That is a delightful bit of Arcady along the riverside below Upavon, with its old church tower, and between the green heights of Casterly Camp and Chisenbury Ring. Through clean, narrow strips of meadow the stream speeds ever onward, rushing over hatches into swirling pools, swishing under the rambling boughs of bordering copses, scooping out deep holes at sharp corners, and purling away over gravel to lash the roots of oak or willow at yet another elbow, till it seems suddenly to remember that it is a dry-fly river, not a mountain brook, and steadying down, rolls brimming and placid between pollard willows to the mill-dam at Chisenbury, which is the material cause of its return to sobriety. Here on the bank stands the ancient mill-house, and beyond lush paddocks and patches of waist-deep burdock rise stately elms beneath whose shade stands the fine old manor-house of that Wiltshire Grove who took part in the Wiltshire

Penruddocks' rising against Cromwell, and lost his head.

But enough of this. The booming of cannon, the rumble of commissariat wagons, the cracking of musketry, and rush of squadrons is now not far away. Thus far down the valley and a little farther peace still reigns. But away beyond, from the great church of Enford to the woods of Netheravon, and from Netheravon by Durrington and Figheldean to Amesbury the stir of martial things is always in the air, and in the campaigning season it seems odd to some of us to read in the newspapers of two great armies fighting along the whole line of the quiet, secluded, little trout stream we used to know so well. Sometimes the designers of the great autumnal war-game lay it down that the Avon is to stand for a sea-coast which is to be defended from an invading enemy, and we find in our morning papers a large-scale map of its course, with all its mills and villages and little bridges set forth in capitals as strategic points upon which the great British public are requested to fix its critical eye. Of a truth times are changed on the Avon and on the Plain!

The prettiest bit of the Kennet, to my thinking, is where with quickened pace it runs over gravelly bottoms through Ramsbury Chase, hard by the lake below the manor-house, which its waters feed, and where trout of fabulous size disport themselves. And again, below where it steals on to that haunted Littlecote, under whose Tudor gables wild Darrel is credited by local legend with such heinous deeds, and which with much greater certainty sheltered Dutch William

*Photo, E. H. Roberts*

KENNET AT MARLBOROUGH

while opening negotiations with his royal and fatuous father-in-law. Littlecote, like Ramsbury, was famous for large fish. There used to be a stew there in the days of the Popham prosperity, wherein a certain number of large trout were kept in what might be termed honourable captivity, and encouraged to laziness and good cheer. They were lifted out occasionally and placed upon the scales. A well-known local sportsman and raconteur used to maintain that an actual spirit of rivalry grew up among these pampered captives. One old Triton, regarding whose reputed weight I dare not trust my memory, grew so pleased with himself, according to the aforesaid sportsman, that he used to come regularly up to the edge of the stew to be weighed, and lie like a lamb on the scale. And when the tray went down in evidence of his increased well-being, which it generally did, he would flap his tail twice in great exultation. Much, however, must be forgiven to men who live on the banks of streams like this, where the fish do really achieve so large a size that strangers from far counties are apt to be incredulous, and thus put local patriots on their mettle. I remember not so very long ago an amusing encounter with such a man from a very far county, who proved a luminous example of how little one half of the trouting world know how the other half lives, to paraphrase a common aphorism.

It was on a bright summer morning, and I was travelling by train up the Wylie valley to fish a friend's water at Codford. The only other occupant of the carriage was a rosy-faced commercial gentleman in black broadcloth and a top-hat. By the time the

train draws towards Codford the Wylie has shrunk, it must be confessed, to extremely modest dimensions. The obvious nature of my intentions seemed to rouse the commercial gent, who had been apparently taking stock of the little river from the corner seat, to satiric utterance: 'We shouldn't,' said he, with rather a truculent note and an accent that located him precisely, 'call that much of a river where I come from.' 'There are some fine fishermen up there, I can tell you,' he continued, 'and the rivers are something like.' He then spoke eloquently of the Wear and the Tees, both of which I happened to know, and returned again to quite uncalled-for strictures on the pleasant little stream below us. By this display of untutored complacency I was rather moved to take it out of him a little, so asked him if he would be surprised to hear that the average trout of the little stream he regarded with such contempt would swallow the average fish of the noble rivers he so extolled, without feeling much inconvenience. Moreover, that we should have to return here as unsizeable a trout that would almost certainly be the largest of a good basket on the Wear. Finally I ventured to point out that though the Wylie was full of fish it was almost equally certain that the doughtiest of the performers he had in mind would, if dropped down here of a sudden, fail to catch one of them. He quieted down a little on this. In fact he received these crumbs of local information in stony silence, only remarking that he was no fisherman himself, but that he had many friends who were. In such case he probably coupled me with them as a son of Ananias, and profited nothing by my well-meant efforts

at enlightenment. In such frame of mind I left him at Codford station, and having apparently thrown away precious truths I was very sorry there was no time to tell him the Littlecote story. The biggest Kennet trout recorded weighed nineteen pounds. Just before this chapter went to press I curiously enough encountered on the banks of a Welsh lake a keeper who for several quite recent years had charge of the Ramsbury fishing. He had the record of his catches by net and rod at his fingers' ends. They even more than justify what I had already set down here.

The Wylie is, I think, the most pellucid, and at the same time adorns the prettiest vale, of all the Wiltshire streams. As with the Avon, a chain of delightful thatch-roofed villages clustering round, in almost every case, an ancient and interesting church, stretches from Wilton to Heytesbury. There are more than a dozen of such hamlets with fine, old, sonorous names, and indeed, for abounding and genuine thatch commend me to the chalk regions of Wiltshire. People don't go there much, and when they light upon half a dozen thatched cottages in a village in the home counties they sit down at once and write an idyllic essay for a halfpenny paper or a magazine article upon the fact that there are bits of old rural England even yet. It is amazing the number of people possessed of the writing habit to whom the fifty-mile London radius apparently stands for England! Fishermen of course know better.

The water of the Wylie is of astonishing clarity. In some of the deep, narrowish pools in the Wilton Club reaches, for example, you can see the big trout

and grayling, of strange and varied origin, lying packed, cheek by jowl, near the bottom, as clearly as if but a foot of water flowed above them. That delightful classic, *The Vicar of Bullhampton*, it may also be noted, is laid in the Wylie valley, though Trollope, with that whimsical habit of his, introduces a name or two from elsewhere to throw his reader off the scent, and then proceeds to give himself away to the man of local knowledge. Codford claims to be the precise scene of the story. The South Plain spreads away from the narrow green vale of the Wylie into spacious solitudes upon either hand, as did the North Plain from the Avon banks of yore, before war ministers came on the scene with all their brick camps and corrugated iron, and gives a fine quality to the river—the only one of note, by the way, which lives its whole life from its source to its mouth in the county.

To return for a moment to the Avon, below Amesbury, by this time quite a large stream. Resuming its wonted calm, and fringing on its way the grounds of more than one historic manor-house, it pursues its peaceful course to Salisbury. All along here, however, grayling and, unfortunately pike, share its waters with the trout. Lower down still, the latter gets scarcer and larger, and the coarse fish more numerous. Soon after passing into Hampshire at Downton, and certainly at Fordingbridge, the Avon practically ceases to be a trout stream. But then again, at Ringwood, it asserts itself in the most surprising manner, for this class of water, and becomes a salmon river, as everybody knows, and calls itself, in fishing parlance at any rate, 'The Christchurch Avon.' I have no doubt

many people think of it as a Hampshire river, though nearly every drop of water in it comes out of the Wiltshire downs; in addition to which it carries the Wylie with it from Salisbury to the sea. Nor, by the way, do I know of any big town in England where from its very streets you can watch large trout rising, as is the case at Salisbury. For the river prattles upon a gravelly bottom right through it, to wash a little later the back of the cathedral precincts in truly picturesque fashion. Here and below Salisbury are trout, I think, almost as heavy as the monsters of the Kennet. An oil painting of a twelve-pounder, killed near Downton, comes back to me at any rate from the study wall of an old angler with whom I was intimate long ago. Indeed, I cannot imagine a river more likely for the heaviest type of trout than the lower Avon.

## IV

## THE WATERS OF CADER IDRIS

THE waters that spring from the bosom, or born in remoter wilds, wash the skirts of the great Merioneth mountain are many and bright. Chief among the latter are the Wnion from the slopes of Arran and the Mawddach from Trawsfynydd wastes, which mingling their streams at Dolgelly and meeting the tide, form that long, winding estuary to Barmouth, which is, to my thinking, one of the loveliest gems of all British scenery. On the other and southern side, nurtured by the many spouting rills which foam in the deep green troughs above Dinas Mowddwy, sweeps down the strong, swift torrent of the Dovey, swelling as it travels seaward with yet more limpid waters from the boggy, russet uplands of old Plinlimmon. Shedding its brooks to the right and to the left into these wide-wandering rivers, Cader herself can claim at least one lusty, and assuredly no less beautiful, stream for her own particular nursling. And this is the Dysynni, which rises high up in her very throat within the dark shadow of the rocky precipice whose crown forms the mountain-top, and that 'chair' whence the giant Idris, according to ancient faith, used to survey a trembling world, and when out

of temper throw rocks at it, which last may be seen lying here and there in the valleys to this very day. One might fairly say that the Dysynni was born in the gloomy tarn of Llyn-y-cav, which lies almost under the shadow of the precipice. For the rills that feed it are so tiny and so near their source, that in the profound silence, which is rarely broken but by the croak of the raven, the call of the curlew, or the bleat of sheep, you can scarcely hear their feeble piping in the drowsiness of high summer.

Llyn-y-cav is full of smallish trout. A friend of mine who is tolerably reliable in such matters tells me he once filled a basket there. Others declare they have toiled all day and caught nothing. But this is the way of tarns, and there are a good many on the Cader range. A mile or two below, after much plashing and plunging down a moorland, rocky bed, the infant Dysynni ripples through some narrow meadows into the beautiful and quite famous little lake of Tal-y-llyn. I take the last epithet to be not amiss, since for the better part of a century the lake has been the resort of fishermen from far and near, not in great numbers for the restricted nature of the accommodation, but as numerous in the late spring, at any rate, as the capacity of the old, white-washed farmhouse hostelry upon the shore admits of. When I was a boy, a dear old gentleman and angler, beneath whose roof in the Midlands I spent many a week of many Christmas holidays, used to sing the glories of Tal-y-llyn, and in this case literally to *sing* them. For, being of a cheerful temperament and not very musical, he was fond of humming old and familiar

songs, with more regard to words than melody, and sometimes paraphrasing them to suit his own mild adventures, past and prospective. His boys, my cronies and contemporaries, were of course budding fishermen, and often on some dark January morning in that dull, clay country, smirched even there by the smoke of Birmingham, we would all sit down to fly-tying in the snug library under the auspices of my cheery, white-haired host, while he talked of streams and lakes and fishing holidays already, or to be, enjoyed. I can hear him now singing an extemporised refrain of his own, 'And now, boys, now, we 'll be off to Tal-y-llyn.' A little sketch of the lake hung upon the wall, and as I didn't see the subject of it till my old friend had been many years in his grave, the sentiment of early association was strong within me when that day came, and I eagerly turned to the well-worn visitors' book for the, by that time, faded signature I knew so well, with the boys' names underneath. For they too, even then, alas! had joined the majority.

Set in a deep trough, with the mighty mass of Cader rising from its northern shore, the lofty ridge of Arran-y-Gessel springing as sheer and steep upon the other, and the high pass towards Dolgelly shutting out its eastern end, this is assuredly one of the most beautiful little lakes in Wales. It is nearly a mile in length, but narrow in proportion, and though enclosed by mountains is neither sombre nor gloomy. It is not, for instance, like Llyn Ogwen, and still less like Idwal, inspiring in their own way as are these grim Snowdonian lakes. Tal-y-llyn is, in short, not a big tarn, but a lake. The lower mountain slopes, though steep,

are verdant. There are touches also of meadow and woodland; a little farm at the upper and two more at the lower end strike a harmonious note of pastoral life, while the outpouring river plunges down into the green vale of Abergynolwyn beneath the walls of a rude and ancient little church. The two farms at this end of the lake are the regular resorts of the visiting angler, the notable one, an inn, already alluded to, and a smaller house, which in my day at least was of slight account. The former, the Tyn-y-cornel, had then, I fancy, the sole right of putting boats on the water. Any one, I believe, could fish from the shore, but there were very few people in those parts to exercise the right. The Tyn-y-cornel, however, in my time, was more usually known as 'Jones's,' and possibly is so still. For though this worthy has been gathered to his fathers, his daughters, I believe, still maintain the ancient ways of the pleasant if unpretentious snuggery. The waters of the lake lap up close to the door, before which the coaches from Dolgelly in the tourist season, which is not, however, the trouting season, unburdened themselves betimes, and for a brief hour disturbed the blessed calm, causing the colonels in residence, of whom anon, to swear horribly. The garden at the back opens straight on to the mountain, and the prospect all round is glorious. On a fine May day it is a spot for the gods.

There were some half-dozen boats attached to the inn, and I don't think the latter held more than a dozen people, so even if all were fisher-folk the procedure was simplicity itself. Moreover there was no charge and no boatmen, the latter omission, from my

perhaps perverted standpoint, being an infinite advantage. I am not, to be sure, a very enthusiastic fisher from a drifting boat, and still less enamoured of the all-day company of the average boatman, unless, of course, he is a man of parts and character, which makes a vast difference. Otherwise, if he is not bored and blasé, I cannot help putting myself in his place and feeling sure that I should be. I would sooner have a brother fisherman at the other end and share with him the toils of the oar, or, failing that, as often happened on Tal-y-llyn, manage the boat myself. Indeed, this gives a little extra interest, though a little too arduous when a strong wind is blowing. Tal-y-llyn, a curious feature for a mountain lake, is, for the most part, less than ten feet deep, with a soft, weedy bottom, and has, in consequence, fine feeding qualities. April, May, and early June, speaking broadly, constitute its season. After that I think the sport is generally poor. I have occasionally gone up there for the day in the after months, not generally on fishing bent, but for the mere charm of the place, or for a day's outing, in the company of friends, and the resident anglers at such season, if not actually depressed, were never in serious or industrious mood. When they have kindly offered to take me out in their boat, as has sometimes happened, they have been always suspiciously ready to take the oars while I wielded their rod, an entertainment I never found profitable at that season, nor they either, I think.

I once, however, spent a good part of May at Tal-y-llyn and then all was energy, and we caught lots of fish which averaged about half a pound, an excellent

standard, to my thinking, for any lake—certainly for one of the accessible and less costly kind, for it means more fish of a handsome and respectable type and more sport. Till you get to the very large fish, which is another matter, plenty of half-pounders are, I think, more comforting than occasional pounders, for the latter have little more chance of defeating you, if properly hooked in the middle of a lake, than the former. The west wind blowing up the open ten miles of valley from the sea, even if it were not the fishermen's wind, is the one to be invoked on Tal-y-llyn, shut in as it is upon the other three sides by mountains. Sometimes it lashes the short mile of water into raging billows and blows you down the drifts, despite the big stone hung overboard as a drag, with deplorable velocity, and the inevitable pull back against the storm a dozen times perhaps in a day puts you out of conceit with the fancy for being your own boatman. But this is only on occasions as rare, perhaps, as those still worse ones which from morn till eve confront the lake fisher with an unbroken surface of glass, when the only thing to be done is to go up a mountain—no bad alternative either at Tal-y-llyn.

The fish here are emphatically short risers, as only becomes a breed whose ancestors have been fished over for a hundred years. Above all, when soft breezes just ruffle the face of the waters and the season advances, the Tal-y-llyn trout are preternaturally sharp, and you have to be painfully wideawake. It is then, no doubt, that the highest skill, or rather the keenest alertness, is required in lake fishing. Three flies of small size were used, and it is needless to say,

upon the finest gut. The partridge-green comes back to me as a Tal-y-llyn favourite, as it is on so many other Welsh lakes. On favourable days we generally had some ten pounds, or about twenty fish, to the boat of two rods—firm, well-conditioned, hard-fighting fish too. A modest-seeming haul, no doubt, to the wanderer by far-off, less sophisticated, and more highly appraised waters. But then, after all, there is some satisfaction in killing sophisticated fish, while as for environment you might range the three kingdoms in vain for a more perfect beauty spot than this secluded little lake resting so bewitchingly in the lap of Cader. There had been up to that time, I think, no re-stocking, an omission, if indeed such it is (a rather open question), that has no doubt been since remedied. A pounder was my best fish during that May, and I remember it very well as I was alone in the boat, and a gale raising high waves was fast driving me on to a rocky shore. The Tal-y-llyn boats, to be sure, were not easily staved in, an advantage which was less apparent when you had to scull them back after each drift for three-quarters of a mile into the teeth of a west wind. But these things lent variety, and even at times excitement, to the rather even placidity of lake trouting from a boat.

A little later in that same year I found myself afloat on Lake Vyrnwy, that five-mile stretch of water which the Liverpool corporation have dammed back into the wild heart of the Berwyn mountains. I did not enjoy that so well, though the expense, and not perhaps without justification, was about twice and a half as much again. This was not altogether because the

fish were rising indifferently, and certainly not for lack of scenic charm, for Lake Vyrnwy is both imposing and beautiful. Moreover I had known that sequestered mountain valley before its submersion, together with its little church, its vicarage, its inn, and scattered homesteads. There was something uncanny in casting one's fly over the top of these ancient abodes abandoned to mud and slime, to water-weeds, and eels, and the haunt, no doubt, of cannibal trout whom anglers at the hotel caught in their dreams, but never in their waking hours. But I got very tired of my boatman, a miner from Ruabon, particularly when at times the light breeze failed us. It was obvious he would sooner have been singing hymns in a Ruabon chapel or watching a football match. There was, and still is here, a very comfortable, modern, well-equipped hostelry, too much so, perhaps, for my no doubt heretical notions.

You are apt to get parties in too sumptuous apparel glaring at one another from separate tables. You have the lady angler, too, who is just acquiring the jargon of the craft, and displays it with naïve assiduity for the benefit of the neighbouring table. You enjoy many other advantages of civilisation, which are very nice if you are taking a course of waters at Harrogate or Llandrindod, but to my prehistoric notions, when one goes a-fishing, strike a rather jarring note. The conventions seem better left behind. Heaven forbid that I should be thought to single out Lake Vyrnwy as a mark for my belated prejudices! It merely suggested a type, and one, too, that I am quite sure nowadays is in general demand. It is a beautiful and well-

stocked lake, in exclusive possession of this comfortable and delightfully situated hotel.

But for myself I like the old-fashioned fishing-inn, the simple parlours, the cosy bar, even the stuffy bedrooms. I like the old-timers that haunt, or used to haunt it, and can suffer their expanded fish lies, or, to be more polite, their terminological inexactitudes, with joy and gladness for all the fish that they have really caught, and all the waters that they have really fished. They do not, I am afraid, exchange their fishing outfit at night for a boiled shirt and dress jacket, but stick their stockinged feet into felt slippers. Nor, I fear, do they call for gingerade, nor hot water neat, nor soda-and-milk as the hour of rest approaches, but for whisky unabashed, and with a slice of lemon in it, for auld lang syne, like the immortal Silas Wegg. And sometimes the calls of ancient friendship demand a second, which leads to another bit of coal upon the fire, and then they wander over old ground from the Tamar to the Tay. What they are when at home, some of these ancients—sharp enough fellows when they have got their business coats on again, no doubt—you might crack with them, and fish with them for a month and never guess, so thoroughly and so completely are they soaked for the time in the passion of their holiday hours. Perhaps they are passing away, or have already passed. The world, maybe, is getting too rackety and too complex nowadays to breed such characters. When anybody can get anywhere by motor in a few hours without thought or without trouble, the sentiment, one might say the charm, of these old, wide wanderings is more than half destroyed. The inner

sanctuaries are vulgarised, the mystery of sequestered places has vanished, or is vanishing. And then the charm of finding them, and knowing them, and sharing the knowledge with a few kindred souls, has gone too, together with many other things of a quieter world, which could not be had without a little enterprise and a little trouble, and were surely the sweeter for it.

There were the colonels, too, under which term I must include majors and captains, in the old days. There was nearly always one at every quiet fishing-inn, very often a rather thirsty soul, and sometimes, it must be admitted, a bit of a nuisance. For I have not, of course, in mind the active warrior on short leave, nor even the retired one of recent and abstemious days. But an earlier generation, who had worn side-whiskers as subalterns and pushed the bottle briskly at mess, seems to have been prolific in half-pay bachelors who drifted in their later days almost instinctively towards the fishing-inn, and made it practically their summer residence. Almost inevitably, too, they came to fill what might be called the chair in the ever-shifting company, and sometimes filled it a trifle autocratically. It was not good for their health, in spite of the counteracting advantages of the outdoor life, which gave them no doubt a longer innings. No human wight with convivially sociable tastes could keep pace with relays of old-timers who could afford to be cheerful and let themselves go a little for two or three idle weeks of a busy year. So the colonels, I am afraid, went under sooner or later. Sometimes the descent to Avernus became painfully obvious, and when they began to remain over the winter it was always the beginning

of the end. A good many of them, forgotten in their premature decline by old comrades and relatives alike, lie in country churchyards among the mountains of Wales, the victims of too much leisure, otherwise too much conviviality, and indirectly, alas, of a love for the rod.

Three veterans, by no means colonels, however, used to meet annually at Tal-y-llyn. It was an unalterable fixture, a law of the Medes and Persians. One came from Yorkshire, the other from SouthWales, and a third from London. Their respective wives, I have some reason to believe, had never seen each other. Not belonging precisely to the same grade of society, they would, doubtless, have refused to meet! But for this the three ancients, I am sure, cared less than nothing. They were great cronies. The best boats—and the boats as well as the oars were anything but a level lot at Tal-y-llyn—were reserved for them as a matter of prescriptive right. Even the colonel, and there was very much of a colonel, and sometimes two, at the Tyn-y-cornel in those days (both have gone under), took a back seat in the choice of boats for these three weeks. The trio were also men of method. Whitmonday always fell some time in their holiday, and as punctually upon that morning they all drove to Machynlleth in Mr. Jones's cart, and took the railway to Aberdovey, where they fished in the sea that afternoon and the next morning, returning at night to renew their labours on Tal-y-llyn.

Every one of middle age familiar with the Wye in its higher reaches, knows the pathetic story of the three fishers, not Kingsley's, 'who went out into the

west when the sun went down,' but old cronies who for a lifetime resorted every year to that once famous old hostelry, The Three Cocks, near Glasbury. And how first one died in harness, then the other; and how the survivor, when too feeble and rheumatic to wield a salmon-rod, used to come down to the old quarters and wander in mournful guise along the river bank. It is no legend, but a true tale. I know the inn well, and have seen some of the tackle they left behind them there, carefully treasured.

Now displayed upon the wall of the parlour at the Tyn-y-cornel there is, or was when I frequented it, a life-size illustration of a trout, executed by one of its former fishing colonels, who was also no mean artist. This picture was a great asset to the inn, for its subject presented a perennial and practically insoluble problem. It provoked the curiosity of the newcomer as soon as ever he had found his tongue; and then the oldest habitué in residence, probably the colonel, or if he was resting, the next guest in seniority of association, as a matter of right and etiquette told the story, which is in truth a sufficiently marvellous and withal a perfectly true one.

Near by the roadside on the wild pass leading up from the head of Tal-y-llyn over the mountain and by the old Cross-fords inn to Dolgelly is an insignificant tarn, historically entitled to the designation of Llyn-y-tri-graien, or 'the lake of the three grains,' but vulgarly known, doubtless for its very insignificance, as Pebble pool. The three grains, I might remark, are represented by three rocks which Idris, whose passion for stone-throwing has been alluded to, flung down

there in a rage as they had got into his shoe and incommoded him. If memory serves me you could almost throw a biscuit across the pool's shallow, transparent waters. There are no fish in it, nor from its appearance would any passer-by for a moment expect there to be. Some thirty years ago it looked just the same, nor did any traveller upon this often travelled highway suspect that the shallow, transparent pond was the haunt of anything bigger than a minnow.

One day, however, a well-known local character, while driving by, saw what he believed, though he could scarce credit his eyes, to be a monster trout. So, of course, he stopped at the inn on his way down the valley and related the astounding vision to all there concerned, and as this was in the fishing season everybody in the house was greatly moved thereat. For the wayfarer was a man of standing, fish knowledge, and sober habit. One of the colonels, indeed the very artist who immortalised the fish on the parlour wall, being in residence, it fell to him of course to take the necessary steps. Being then in his prime and not long on the retired list, he set off at once for the lonely pool, near the head of the pass, armed for the fray. I knew him well in after years, and he often told me the tale of the great capture which, in fact, was a brief one and of slight interest compared to the mystery of the trout itself. For the latter took his natural minnow almost, I think, at the first offer, which was not after all very strange, as he had probably denuded the pond by this time of its live-stock. The fish was brought to the bank successfully after a lively contest, and weighed just

five pounds—a positive whale for these mountains, and in any case a phenomenon, as the sole denizen and product of a little patch of what might almost be mistaken in golfer's phrase for 'casual water.' How long had he been there? whence came he, and why had no one ever before seen him? Nor again was there any access up the smallest water-course to the pool. However, the fish had got there somehow, presumably in infancy, and acquired cunning perhaps as he waxed and fattened, lying perdu by day and raiding his preserve of grubs and minnows by night. But these are the things that have kept the tongues of the wisest at Tal-y-llyn wagging to small purpose for over three decades, and the problem, I have no doubt, is as fresh and mysterious and insoluble as ever. For there, I am told, is the fish still upon the wall, and there beyond any doubt by the roadside, high up the pass for every wayfarer to see, is the Pebble pool, and those who have seen both can guess at the life-story of that mysterious sockdolager in such fashion as may seem good to each of them.

When I began this chapter I had no intention of lingering so long at Tal-y-llyn, seeing how much more time I have actually spent upon the river which runs out of it and away down towards the sea which it meets near Towyn. I have not so much as set eyes on either lake or river for a dozen years. But away back in the eighties a little group of us, old friends and all fishermen, and what was infinitely more remarkable at that remote date, not being North Britons, all golfers, used to repair thither with our belongings for the month of August and perhaps a little more.

Our men-folk persuaded their wives that it was the nicest place in Wales because there were no trippers, and by a more convincing argument that on its rather melancholy but level sands the children couldn't get drowned if they tried. For one or more in every party of infants invariably makes an attempt at self-destruction if they have half a chance. The tyrant sex, too, liked to feel when they were away up the Dysynni, sewin fishing, that their progeny were quite safe. It was some years before the ladies struck, if so harsh a term may be used; the children and the men never did. Towyn was very small in those days, and was proudly regarded by its inhabitants as particularly select. The last time I went through it and stopped to call upon my old friend and everybody's friend, the chemist and fishing-tackle vender, he almost shed tears at the social slump in the way of summer visitors that had taken place. A psychical moment had in fact occurred some years before in the history of Towyn. It was a question of making a golf-course, where nature had provided them with almost a ready-made one of the finest quality, or building a long, expensive, and dreary asphalt promenade.

Now there was not a single golf-course then in the whole of Wales. Aberdovey close by, the first in the Principality, was not quite yet laid out. We had already in our off hours played for many Augusts over as fine a natural surface with sand-hills, bunkers, and keen turf as could be desired, to the amazement of natives and visitors, none of whom had ever before seen the uncanny thing. Such a chance, and at such a moment, never offered itself to a little watering-

place. The southern courses could have been then counted upon the fingers of two hands. But the southerner was already inoculated, and we beheld the coming boom as plain as daylight. But to the arbiters of Towyn's destiny our urgent representations seemed so much foolishness. So they spent thousands (the great man did) in an effort, mostly vain I think, to decoy the negro minstrel, the tripper, and the brass band, where hundreds laid out on a golf-course would have made a different place of it, and 'the select' fled before the asphalt with its possibilities. *Hinc illae lachrymae* of the patriotic chemist. The monstrous blunder has been tardily rectified. Our old stamping-ground, where we astonished the natives, and despite the terrors of wandering black bulls of truculent character enjoyed ourselves, save perhaps on our improvised putting-greens, is now, I believe, what it should have been made twenty-five years ago. But to what purpose, speaking relatively? For the coast of Wales—north, west, and south—is now a chain of golf links!

There was always, too, an annual cricket match between the visitors and the local club, all working men, whose mother and only tongue was Welsh. There was something racy in playing a team who had no English and whose captain placed his men and shouted his instructions in the ancient tongue of the Cymry. There was something more than risky in facing fast bowling on the local wicket. For myself, I always looked forward with dread to the inevitable encounter, and instead of a bold and cheerful mien always walked to the wicket in a cold sweat. We had

some talent, and could have given our opponents great odds on an average English village green. But so utterly were we cowed by the rugged irregularities of the pitch that we were generally beaten. It was only an afternoon match, but all four innings, when such were necessary, were easily completed long before the limit hour, so frequently did a wide to the off take your leg stump or the reverse.

The Dysynni was a very interesting and a very beautiful river. It was tolerably good for one that comes within the scope of a light-hearted domestic holiday. The ladies thought us rather brutal, and with some justice, as we were always praying for rain. In our heart of hearts we couldn't have enough of it, though we didn't perhaps say so. For the rain took the sewin and some salmon up, and though there was a great deal of netting at the mouth, a fair number escaped. One great merit of the Dysynni lay in the fact that from Peniarth, some four miles up, where the rapid water ceased, the river ran deep and slow, and was slightly affected for some distance by the tide. Above Peniarth it was swift and broken with all the characteristics of a mountain stream; so that after rain, when the water was in condition, we could fish the upper part to advantage, and when that ran low and clear we could apply ourselves so long as there was a breeze to the deep, sluggish reaches below. The sewin and trout lay and rose, when they felt disposed to rise, in both. But the brown trout in the upper water were usually of the smaller breed, those in the lower waters were mostly pounders or thereabouts. This was, of course, ages before the days of motors. It

was before the days even of safety bicycles. I don't think fishermen, not perhaps being a venturesome race, ever rode those high, fearsome things of ancient times, a fall from which seemed to portend certain death. So our party used to drive in a rusty wagonette from the Corbett Arms to the old stone bridge near the village of Bryncrûg, when we fished the lower water, and by rough roads to Peniarth, when we fished the upper reaches. It was all association water, but there were not many fishermen on it in those days, and there was abundant room. I recall those jog-trot drives up the valley as not the least pleasant part of the programme. We were always happy and in high good temper as we went out, particularly if a light rain was blowing up from the sea in a dull sky.

On looking back, pangs of remorse seize me that we ought to have thought more of our dejected families, threatened with a whole day's imprisonment within the walls of Towyn lodging-houses, looking out upon a dreary sea. We ought not to have been so cheerful. It was utterly wrong. But man is a selfish animal and woman a long-suffering one—or she used to be. A lady the other day begged and implored me to make a fisherman of her husband. Of course he may have bored her, and if I had felt certain of that I would have done my best, but they seemed to be a reasonably devoted couple, and I absolutely declined to have a finger in any such business, particularly as it would have been a hopeless task. Our drives home were not always so cheerful, but after a good day they were the best of all. I look upon it as one of the stoutest evidences of the nobility of woman, that after being shut

up for the whole of a rainy day in cramped quarters she can get up as much excitement over the turning out of a good basket on to a kitchen dish as the captor himself secretly feels, though of course he always takes it coolly, as if it were an everyday affair, well as his wife knows it to be nothing of the kind.

On the two miles or so of dead water between Peniarth and Bryncrûg bridge, along whose margin a thin fringe of bulrushes was always whispering, the procedure was curious. At any rate I have never fished any other water in the same way, and indeed I am not sure if I know any quite like this one. We used small flies of ordinary trout pattern, two and sometimes three of them on moderately fine gut. We fished straight up stream, of which last, however, there was practically none, for the sufficient reason that the necessary breeze always blew up the valley. The river was just about a long cast in width, but we did not concern ourselves much with the middle nor exert ourselves to test the opposite bank. Experience—and there was a great deal of concentrated local experience in the matter—held it to be unprofitable. The sewin seemed nearly always to be within a yard or two of the bank close to the reeds. So, though not wholly neglecting mid-stream, we mainly cast and worked our flies close to the near bank. It was a rather monotonous method, as the river was like a canal save for its clear mountain water and the game fish that swam in it. But against this we had the consolation of remembering that it was only possible to fish it on so many days because of this monotonous character. Had it been a merry, shallow, chattering river, as in

fact it was above, and like most sea-trout rivers, it would only have been fishable in times of fresh water. It was for these staunch and enduring qualities we so greatly esteemed it, though that of patience on our part was sometimes severely tested. The sewin ran from one to four pounds, and the occasional trout generally exceeded the former weight, and all were shapely, clean fish. How beautiful is the leap of a freshly hooked sewin—a bar of silver in the sunshine! A mediæval Welsh bard thought a sewin in the sunshine was the most beautiful sight in the world, next to the ladies of Merioneth. We usually got a brace or two a-piece (sewin, I mean), though both red-letter days and yet more blank ones rise to memory; or more often perhaps, in the case of the latter, have sunk into oblivion.

Grey days in summer time, when waters are ruffling, woods blowing, reeds bending, rushes or moor grasses whistling in a warm wind, have always had for me a strange and unfathomable charm. I cannot analyse it, but can dimly trace its origin to boyish days on Exmoor and feel its fixed abiding charm. It was the same at twenty-five as at fifteen, at—well, we won't go on! Enough that it remains almost—for something of life's freshness must fade—as strong as ever. Water, no doubt, is the centre of all the ingredients that make up this particular landscape effect, which has for me such a peculiar fascination. It has been pronounced eccentric! Familiars who cannot understand it have stoutly protested that it has something to do with fishing. I could not positively swear that its origin was wholly dissociated from trout, but not in the almost

brutal way they would have it. There are lots of people who are always shouting for sunshine, every day and all the time, and wishing they were in Italy, or California, or Mexico, or some other parched-up country with a 'superb climate.' I worshipped at the shrine of the sun-god, not over willingly on his account, for a good many years, and when we did get a dull day, how glorious and stimulating it was! Even the sun-worshippers gave thanks. Even 1911 in Old England, a mere trifle of course in the matter of heat, gave pause to the devotion of some.

Dysynni memories are much associated with such grey days, for the good reason that we had a great many of them, and I recall them with infinite tenderness. If the lower river and its fringe of swaying reeds was a bit sombre, rolling through level meadows to the wide open level mouth of the valley against which the grey seas tumbled, what glories of hill, mountain, and woodland lay all about it! The wild, lofty ridge that shut us out from the Dovey valley, furrowed with pellucid streams which spouted down from their high bogs through bosky glens of oak and fern; the Craig-a-deryn too ('Bird rock'), which shot up for six hundred feet sheer in the midst of the narrowing valley, while to its rocky crown the sea-fowl travelled over our heads in great companies every evening from the coast. And ever in front of us, at the far head of the vale, beyond the folding foot-hills, the great pile of Cader lifted itself against the sky. All these things were assuredly no less effective and inspiring when storms brooded over them and they opened and shut in whirling clouds; and when, peradventure, the morn-

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ing sun shone upon them the next day, what radiancy was theirs! what sparkling meadows, what glowing hillsides!

Those much less frequent days when the upper and rapid part of the water was fishable, and provided a change of venue, always brought pleasurable anticipations and sometimes pretty fair results, as results were counted on the Dysynni. The river is smaller up here, just an ordinary trout stream of the less rugged Welsh sort, a stream of pools and gravelly glides easily compassed from its meadowy bank. It soon ran down out of condition, but in the process we generally had a fairly merry time with the sewin, which sometimes took a Devon minnow in the clearing of the water from porter to brown sherry colour. All this fishing, both upper and lower, was known as the Peniarth water, and that ancient mansion of the Wynns, amid its thick, wind-buffeted woods, stood here near the river bank, the repository at one time, and still I think in a measure, of the famous Peniarth MSS., one of the most valuable collections of ancient manuscripts in Wales. Most of this Peniarth water had been handed over to the association for the benefit of Towyn and its visitors.

But above these reaches, and running up through the narrowing and always lovely valley to the village of Abergynolwyn, came a long stretch of private water preserved by its owner, who was both resident and a keen fisherman, though now long dead. I always admired that unselfish soul, though I scarcely knew him to speak to. One of our party had a slightly nearer acquaintance, so his generosity to us was per-

haps a little less remarkable. But any respectable visitor at Towyn who wrote to him for a day's fishing was granted it with the further privilege of bringing a friend. If he hadn't been a fisherman, though most non-fishermen don't look at it that way, the concession would merely have been a piece of civility creditable under the circumstances, but which cost practically nothing. Here, however, was a keen sportsman with two miles of excellent sewin water, when and while it was in order, inviting strangers whom he had never seen to come and, so to speak, share it with him in the best four or five weeks. Now I know a man, and a wealthy one too, who lives upon and owns six miles of as fine a rapid trout river as you would find anywhere. Half a dozen rods upon it every fishable day of the season would do it rather good than harm. He, too, is a keen fisherman. He is an old schoolfellow of mine, and once being in the neighbourhood I lightly suggested (fortunately I got no further) to a third party, who knew him well, that I should ask him for a day or two's fishing. The third party roared with laughter: 'Old schoolfellow! Why, I doubt if his own brother could get a day. I know his own rector can't, who has fished the river all his life till this engaging alien swooped down upon it. He might ask you to dinner (which, by the way, he actually did). He 's quite normal otherwise, but a day's fishing! Not much!' I was further warned by the strongest hint from his wife, and all this is quite true. Six miles—think of it! and then have regard to this generous Welsh major!

I always felt sorry that the major was out on the

very day in all the years that we made our bumper basket on his water. I use the plural for brevity, but it will require much qualifying, just as the regrets that the owner was out on a presumably propitious day will require some explanation. Now by long odds the most successful sewin fisherman of our party was an old friend of my youth. He was the Nestor among us as regards the Dysynni, and had fished it for I don't know how many years, having some old connection with the neighbourhood. At any rate he had established an understanding with the Dysynni sea-going fish that no one, local or alien, ever I think quite equalled. His favourite fly—a variety of claret and mallard, if I remember rightly—was dressed especially for the Towyn tackle-vender, and called by my friend's name and recommended to all strange fishermen. Possibly it is still. Wickham, Hoffland, Francis, and other classic characters writ large on the parchment margin of the Towyn chemist's case of flies took a back seat, and the—well, never mind, bade fair to give my friend immortality upon the banks of the Dysynni. Sea-trout fishing theoretically is simple, straightforward work, calling apparently for no special deftness, nor pregnant with any great mysteries like trouting. But my friend had some gift, and possibly an unconscious trick of so manœuvring his flies, even in the dead waters where one cast was exactly like another, as to kill more sewin than anybody, and if a salmon was about and was to be caught at all, he always nipped it. Probably he was also what is known as a lucky fisherman.

But at any rate on this occasion he and I, armed

with the major's permits, started in at the head of his water, just below the village of Abergynolwyn, where the river is quite small. It was a perfect fishing morning. There was exactly the right amount of water, and it had fined nicely down into fly condition after a day or two of heavy rain. The sun was shining upon grove, mead, and mountain, which fairly sparkled as only West Britain can sparkle when illuminated after summer storms, and a beautiful soft breeze was blowing. We did nothing, I think, till we got to the confluence of the stream from Llanfihangel, at the foot of Cader, with the Dysynni. Nor do I think at sandwich-and-flask time, half a mile below, had we more than a couple of sewin, and a few respectable brook trout between us. Then as we proceeded lower my friend began to work his conjuring tricks. To shorten my tale, he killed that afternoon, if memory serves me, nine sewin and certainly three grilse of from five pounds to six pounds a-piece. Fortunately he had his son with him to carry them. As for me, it was one of those evil days in which one fancies some accursed imp must be seated on one's shoulders. It is of no consequence, and all of us are liable to them. Every sewin, but a miserable brace basketed, that took me, either went off with the fly through my fault or that of the gut and a very stiff rod, or else shook himself free in the encounter. Nor was it likely that a salmon was going to look at anybody so hopelessly out of favour with the gods.

But it did rather disturb us under the circumstances when in the evening we met the major and two friends who had been fishing the lowest reaches beneath the

house, that they too had practically nothing between them. And when my friend's son, staggering under the weight of his father's catch, laid it out upon the bridge for inspection, the major would have been more than human if he had not felt something of an inward twinge at the contrast, and on his own water too. But being, as I am sure he was, very much of a sportsman and a gentleman, he had nothing but hearty congratulations on the sport his water had provided for a comparative stranger.

Now, at the mouth of the Dysynni, where a mile or so north of Towyn it runs under the Cambrian railroad bridge into the sea, there used at certain conditions of the tide to be very good bass-fishing. One summer an impulsive Irish friend of mine joined our party for a time—a young man of great originality, a fine horseman, and something of a poet, but of so mercurial a temperament and such impetuous habit that he seldom came into a room without chipping a piece of furniture or knocking something off the mantelpiece. But, as there was practically no furniture in the Towyn furnished apartments, and nothing on the mantelpiece but photographs of deceased dissenting ministers with leonine manes and Newgate fringes, we thought it safe to ask him down, as we were much attached to him. Though otherwise an extremely personable young man, he had a close, tightly curled crop of the reddest hair I have ever to my knowledge seen. And I don't think this description can be much too strong. For I once introduced him, suddenly as it so happened, and without warning, to a plain American of the homespun type on tour.

This gentleman was so taken aback, that instead of releasing his hand after the conventional shake, or even saying 'I 'm happy to meet you, sir,' he gripped it fast and held it there, as if concerned lest a side-show that hadn't been mentioned in Baedeker should escape him before he had thoroughly examined it. When his deliberate inspection was concluded he found his tongue. 'I didn't rightly catch your name, sir, but you 've *a mighty red head anyway*!' and then he released him. I might remark, in extenuation of the Homespun's freedom of manner, that my poppy-headed friend was under twenty at that time. The ladies, however, who are better judges of such things, always maintained that he had the most beautiful hair they had ever seen. Beautiful or otherwise, it expressed his breathless, heady temperament to a fault.

His first visit to me had been at another fishing-place when he was perhaps eighteen. I didn't know him to speak of at that time and had advised him to bring tackle. So he arrived with a new rod and fly-book. The stream there happened to be steep and torrential, a mass of crags and boulders and deep pools. He was of East Anglian rearing though of Irish blood, and had never beheld such things, nor even a trout. An old ex-keeper took him in hand and told me that he had never seen such a young gentleman in all his life, that he had never laughed so much since he was born, and that his sides still ached. He couldn't keep his feet, the old man said, for thirty consecutive seconds, and at the very start he slid clean over his head into a deep pool. Dick had apparently spent the morning upside down in water of all depths,

Being a humorist, I half suspect he appreciated the paroxysms of mirth into which he threw the old keeper, and once wet through continued to indulge him by a series of subtly planned disasters. Anyway, it was his first and last day's fishing till the occasion, years later, to which all this is trending. He did, to be sure, insist on coming up the Dysynni as bearer of my net and basket one morning, but very soon disappeared, and incidentally with the landing-net, which he carried over various mountain-tops till eventide.

Now there was a very sedate, retired, and solitary Anglo-Indian staying at Towyn that summer. He was very fond of fishing, though he affected, I think, other waters, and we knew him but slightly. He was also a keen bass-fisher, which we were not. For the Dysynni, it should be said, after lingering in broad, irregular, tidal reaches about Towyn, draws together under the railway bridge, and with brisk current once more in the guise of a river, races for a few hundred yards swiftly to the sea. This spot at nightfall was the bass-fisher's haunt. The fish here ran about five pounds a-piece, and were angled for with a fearsome fly (so-called) about the size of a water-wagtail, and armed with one or more hooks that would have gone through your arm and out at the other side. It was *not* a dry fly! They fished it wet—generally in the gloaming and into the dark when the tide served. This stretch between the bridge and the sea was short, and if half a dozen sportsmen were at work together the hurtling of their respective missiles through the air, I have been told, for I never joined their ranks, made intimidating music in the ear of the next in the pro-

cession. They were all of course safe men, but in the dark anything may happen, so I was rather surprised one morning at being accosted in the street by the grave Anglo-Indian.

'What a nice young fellow that is staying with you.'

'Yes,' I said, 'he 's a capital chap.'

'He has kindly promised to come out bass-fishing with me to-night.'

'Going with you? Surely not; he never fished in his life' (the sole occasion above-mentioned did not seem worth allusion).

'So he told me, but I have promised to lend him a rod and tackle, and it 's pleasant to have a companion out there at night and for the walk each way.'

'Undoubtedly, but do leave it at that, and don't put a rod into his hands whatever you do, or he 'll smash it, if it 's smashable; but if you don't mind that, on no account go within fifty yards of him. He will hook you to a dead certainty, and possibly even drown you.' I felt bound to put it rather strongly, though I couldn't of course justify these portentous forebodings. But I knew my young friend pretty intimately from the soles of his boots to the top of his head, and felt absolutely certain that this Anglo-Indian would somehow rue his generous but reckless overtures. But he only smiled, and said he would take good care of himself.

'So you 're going bass-fishing with Colonel Lucknow, are you, to-night?'

Rather shamefacedly Dick admitted the soft impeachment. For he had railed at the gentle art ever

since he had played the porpoise in the mountain stream seven years back. Nor had our luck so far in the few days of his stay been such as to inspire an unbeliever, for which last I was devoutly thankful. But it transpired that he had seen some very big bass brought in the night before, the size of which and the Anglo-Indian's amiable solicitations had touched his ardent temperament. I have noticed that the unbeliever, if otherwise a sportsman, is often warmed up at the notion of a big fish. A tarpon or a sturgeon appeals to him, which of course only emphasises his hopeless state of mind. Relative tackle means nothing to him. He sniffs a sort of personal encounter in the deep—a kind of pull-devil, pull-baker business, a tug-of-war. So the solemn colonel and Dick passed out into the gloaming that evening, each armed with a big rod and the fearsome projectiles with which they were to thrash the dark waters of the out-flow. I watched them out of sight, as there was something so delightfully incongruous in the spectacle, and then settled comfortably down before the fire, thanking heaven I wasn't the colonel.

It now becomes imperative to relate that the warrior in question always wore a soft hat of slightly eccentric make and fashioned of some peculiar rough material, which was almost obscured by the flies in it. Most of us have a few on our headgear when on the war-path, but the colonel's hat had become quite one of the jests of the Towyn season. We opined that he dispensed with a fly-book and carried his whole outfit on his head. It was a sort of fore-and-aft contrivance with a little tuft upon the top. Now it may have been ten

o'clock or thereabouts when a rap at the window announced Dick's return, and proceeding to open the front door I was quite relieved to see the colonel with him and apparently sound. I couldn't set down the precise reason for this sense of relief, because the reader never knew Dick, and there probably was never any one quite like him. But as the older man with rather a depressed good-night went off into the darkness towards his lodgings, I noticed that he had something like a white napkin tied round his head, and then I instinctively knew there had been an adventure of some sort. Of course there had! 'Dick,' said I when we got into the sitting-room, 'what have you done to the colonel?'

And then the long pent-up humour of the thing broke forth, and the incorrigible youth sat on the horsehair sofa and shouted with laughter for about five minutes. When he had done I said sternly, 'What does that bandage round his head mean?'

'Lord! it isn't a bandage, it's only a knotted handkerchief instead of his hat.'

'Where's his hat?' said I.

'Half-way to Ireland by this time.'

'What! *the* hat?'

'Yes, of course, *the* hat, flies and all,' said the incorrigible one, falling into another unseemly burst of mirth.

And then in due course I learned that Dick's beastly fly, if such a projectile can be called a fly, in one of his wild, untutored whirlings had fastened in the colonel's hat as it lunged forward, lifted it deftly off his head, and laid it on the surface of the dark, rapid waters of

the Dysynni where they rushed into the deep. Not a living man in Great Britain could have done that by accident except Dick. And if my readers can think I can tell such a foolish tale if it hadn't happened exactly as related, I cannot help it.

'Did you get any fish?' said I.

'Not a fish,' said he; 'this is my second attempt, and it will be my last.'

'That is fortunate for your friends,' I replied.

I saw the colonel the next day, and he was very depressed. He said that at least ten shillings' worth of flies, three casts, and his favourite hat, made to order, had gone out to sea.

He said further that his opinion of my friend as an entertaining companion had suffered no whit, but as a fishing partner my estimate of him was only too true. They had fished of necessity more or less alongside of one another, and so long as it was dusk he managed to elude the wild whistling flights of his neighbour's fly. But when it grew dark, what with the constant eloquence, sociability, and reckless procedure of the other he was compelled to take his chance. 'It might have been worse,' he said, 'for again and again he grazed my ear, and when the blow fell it just took the tufty button of my hat and swept it clear into the river. I wish I had taken your advice, but we live and learn, though I couldn't have imagined there was such a feather-headed chap on earth.'

Poor Dick, he died this long time ago, but I still use to this day the fly-book he gave me in his prompt disgust with fishing, with his name scrawled in a boyish hand upon the parchment. He just missed being a

genius. Nature, I am quite certain, meant him for one, and then disgusted with his utter indifference to her approaches, changed her mind. I have a printed metrical, pseudo-classical drama of his written when he was twenty, and staged amateurly in the town hall of a considerable provincial town with success. The cadence and the language suggest a precocious youth, soaked in the classics and the English poets. But a brief fourth-form career at a public school and a year or two of the same stamp with tutors brought his education to an end at sixteen, and was all he ever had or, it must be owned, he seemed to want. But for a desultory dip, perhaps, into Shakespeare or Tennyson, I don't believe he opened another book worth reading for the rest of his life. Very, very occasionally, he wrote an article or poem which was generally accepted in rather fastidious quarters. He came into some money, and men unworthy to black his boots lived on it, till he died—and that was all! The only thing he could ever stick to was the back of a buck-jumper. There was a good deal, I fancy, of the Lindsay Gordon about him without the maturity. But there is infinite allowance to be made for a brilliant, lovable, impetuous nature, born by some freak into a gloomy, rigid, Calvinistic family, and of course destroyed by it.

I have implied that the lodgings in bygone Towyn, select though it may have been, were Spartan. Our landlady, Mrs. Jellybag Jones, made up in a measure for the meagreness of her accommodation, the elementary nature of her cooking, and the rather disproportionate scale of her terms, by her personal qualities. She was cheery and motherly to a degree, like most

Welsh women, particularly stout ones, and we were all fairly young then. Though low in stature, yet weighing eighteen stone, she did all the work of the house, and her wheezings as she went about it cut us to the heart. But we were comforted by the thought that she had ten months in which to recuperate. She used to laugh betimes uproariously, and during this mirthful process shook all over like the condiment after which we christened her, to distinguish her from all the other Mrs. Joneses with whom our friends and acquaintances were quartered. We were great friends, and went back to her, I think, for three summers, though we often wondered why, except that there wasn't very much choice. Occasionally, but rarely, she flew into a most frightful passion with one or other of us, all about nothing. These paroxysms lasted about thirty seconds and alarmed us dreadfully, not on our own account but on hers, for we thought she would burst. We were seldom able, even by turning the matter over carefully among ourselves, to arrive at the cause of these explosions. They were like frightful thunderstorms bursting suddenly from a summer sky. She would be apologising for them in less than a minute from the first scream and say it was her Welsh blood. And then we used to apologise for things we had never said or intended to say, and the atmosphere was all summer again. I have known much of Wales since those days and hundreds of Welsh people, including dozens of landladies, and never knew one whose Welsh blood boiled with such amazing celerity and on such slight provocation as that of Mrs. Jellybag Jones.

To show how select Towyn was in those good old times, and how justified its leading citizen was in bewailing, as related, its after decline, we were succeeded in these same quarters our last autumn by a bishop, and a very distinguished one too, with all his family, though to be sure they overflowed into the next house. I had the privilege of meeting his lordship soon afterwards, and naturally inquired how he liked Towyn, not venturing to tread on what might have been the unwelcome subject of bed and board. He told me that personally he saw nothing of the country, as he was indoors all the time hard at work at a *magnum opus* which is now a classic, but that the air suited him finely for his purpose. So he must have seen a good deal of Mrs. Jellybag, and heard more of her as she wheezed about the house. I wonder if she gave him a sample of her Welsh blood, for I do not think that the bishop had a protecting Mrs. Proudie by his side. Possibly the awesomeness of his office kept even the Celtic fluid in abeyance. I never saw Mrs. Jones again, but I expect her rent went up after that summer, till the promenade came and shattered the aristocratic reputation of Towyn, so far as I know, for good and all.

But for situation, for fresh breezes, for noble inland prospects, for accessibility to glorious scenes, to say nothing of its river, I still think it one of the pleasantest spots in Wales for August and September.

## V

## THE WELSH BORDERLAND

I ALWAYS think of the streams of the Welsh Border, that is to say, of the English counties bordering Mid and South Wales, as in a class by themselves. This is in part, perhaps, but not I think wholly, a mere personal caprice, come of frequent intercourse with them. They all have much the same characteristics, and as a group come midway, as it were, between the frankly impetuous streams of Wales and the slow-moving waters east of the Severn. The Lugg, the Arrow, and the Teme, the Monnow and the Honddu, the Corve, the Onny, the Rea, and the little Camlad, the only river this last which runs from England into Wales, may be accounted a fairly exhaustive list, and if you know them all you may consider yourself to be on terms of tolerable intimacy with what is often but not quite accurately designated the Marches of Wales. A strong family likeness runs through them all, but the breed is one of quality, not of that common order which satisfies folks to the east of the Severn and south of the Trent and artists who cannot paint fast waters. The fish, too, speaking broadly, like the scenery, come midway between those of Wales and of the slow waters of low-pitched Eng-

land, and average from a quarter to three-quarters of a pound. Though essentially wet-fly rivers, some of them are excellent for dry-fly fishing, if you prefer that method. Practically all of them rise in the Welsh mountains and carry their natal impetuosity into English valleys, whose oftentimes gentle gradients succeed in partially curbing it and creating that compromise between the rapid and slow river which is the ideal of many trout fishermen. Lastly, some of them, notably the Teme and Lugg, are also natural grayling rivers of the first order.

As an item of useful information it may be noted that the whole of them are preserved by owners, lessees or members of clubs. There is very little hotel water and scarcely any free or association fishing. I have myself fished here and there at different times on all these streams, but more frequently of recent years upon the Lugg, though more often to be sure in quest of its grayling, rather than of its trout. There is probably no better portion of the Lugg for a combination of trout and grayling than those pleasant reaches by which it winds its purling way from the battlefield of Mortimer's Cross to Leominster, where it meets its smaller sister the Arrow. It is strange that its upper waters should have been the scene of two historic conflicts: the greater one just mentioned, which seated Edward IV. upon the throne and wrought such havoc among the Lancastrian notables; and that other less known one of Pilleth, which ushers in the first act of Shakespeare's *Henry IV.* and marked the first formidable blow of the 'damned Glendower.' For the Lugg, like the Arrow, rises in the wild moor-

land of Radnor forest, and thence runs down towards Presteign, a babbling alder-shaded brook in a narrow vale, where below the hill of Pilleth Mortimer's levies were rolled up in 1400 by the Welsh, and eleven hundred Herefordians bit the dust. Hence came spurring eastward to London and King Henry that 'Post from Wales loaden with heavy news.'

On leaving Presteign the little river has to fight its way through fine uplifted woody hills, to thread the bosky gorges of Aymestry, through which the Yorkist army marched to Mortimer's Cross, and so out into the pleasant pastures of Hereford. The old grey tower of Kingsland church, which witnessed the fearful slaughter of that sanguinary day, and no doubt the heavenly portents which ushered in its fateful morn, rises significant and conspicuous above the woods and pastures of the now wide opening vale. The river seems here to attune itself to its gentler surroundings, slipping down between crumbling red sandstone banks from gravelly run to rippling pool, and thence into interludes of quiet and deep water. Trees overhang much of it on one bank or the other, occasionally on both, and as wading is neither customary nor desirable, the fishing has generally that flavour of difficulty about it which is or should be accounted to its credit. I doubt if there is a better bit of grayling water in the kingdom than this, or one where they rise more freely in the early autumn months. No worming is practised here as on the Border and in Yorkshire. There is no occasion for it. For when the water is clear in September and October, no matter what the wind's quarter or what like the day, the grayling is

more or less ready to take the fly, and certainly no flies that I for my part ever offer them or have seen my friends offer are more effective than the red-tag and the mid-blue.

In a short week during each of now many successive years on this water, it is curious to remember when comparing it with any trouting record, that half a dozen fish is the nearest to a blank day recorded in my journal. And the Lugg grayling are strong and shapely, averaging like its trout about two to the pound. No reference to written data, however, is needed to recall many a good basket from this alluring stream. Several times while pursuing my homeward way across the big ox pastures to a certain hospitable roof upon the green slopes beyond, I have been thankful that the Lugg is not a wading river, and that the burden of waders and brogues is not added to the burden on one's back. Once or twice I have had to cut short my day from the fact that my tolerably capacious creel would not hold another fish. And it may be remembered that there is no object in sparing grayling whatever might be desirable in some waters with regard to trout. They can always more than maintain themselves against any onslaught of the fly-fisher. Moreover, where the trout shares their water one feels that the more grayling fairly killed the better, as the less noble tenants of the stream are apt in this case to be over pushful towards their betters. In the north, as we shall see, the grayling has in this way worked havoc. But I think in streams like those of Herefordshire, where nature has placed these kindred breeds side by side, she somehow preserves the

balance. Still a vague and no doubt erroneous feeling that a captured grayling makes room for an extra trout removes any compunction to basketing just as many as you can catch, or on those occasions hinted at, as you can carry—even to keeping the little ones.

Thymallus is a queer customer. No one who knows him, so far as he allows himself to be known, denies that. He is in truth rather a mysterious beast. It will generally be noted in technical works on angling that the wise men write with intimacy about trout. But if you read a chapter on grayling a little between the lines, you will see at once that the writers are not on nearly such frank terms with their subject and do not pretend to analyse it so exhaustively. There is, in short, a good deal left to the imagination, and that is quite honest, for it is the only thing to be done. I am not of course alluding to the life and habits of the grayling, but to its impulses and attitude towards the angler on the bank. For my part I have assuredly nothing fresh or original to contribute. The more grayling I catch the less I seem to know about the workings of their mind, and while correcting this very chapter for the press I have yet further to admit that I know less about the grayling than I thought I did when I wrote it but a few months since! As practical jokers, for instance, the trout cannot touch his prolific cousin, though happily this keen sense of humour does not seem to extend itself to the denizens of the Lugg. I have fished nearly all day upon the Till and risen hundreds of grayling to every known grayling fly, and except by a rare and occasional accident never touched one. And what is more, I have

come to realise that such a desirable consummation either with wet or dry fly was virtually impossible. A friend of mine, a very fine dry-fly fisherman, tells me he has had precisely the same experiences upon the Berkshire Lambourn. Now trout couldn't do this if they tried, not keep it up, that is to say, for hours and hours. Small trout, to be sure, can be very persistent and exasperating at this game, but they all take risks and are not nearly as expert in making themselves quite safe. You will have a poor dozen or two at anyrate after a day's entertainment of this kind, and though you may feel very ruffled, and very hot, and very tired when it is over, your state of mind will be nothing to the exasperation aroused by a couple of hours of it with three to the pound grayling. I remember at my first encounter with this mood on the Till, after being wrought up into a state of high fever, resorting to the floating fly and killing a fish on the very first two presentations of it. 'Now, my friends, I am going to take it out of you,' was my triumphant ejaculation, for they had probably never been introduced to this form of presentation in their lives. But it was no good. The word was evidently passed up stream and down that some devilment was on, and they flicked contemptuously and harmlessly at both wet and dry fly for the rest of the day.

But the Lugg grayling never do this sort of thing. They come very short at times, of course, which is within their rights, and occasionally they do not come at all, but they have not the diabolic sense of humour of these others. Perhaps, after all, it is

a characteristic of the imported grayling and undeveloped in the indigenous species? Indeed, it is hardly too much to say that in September, providing the water is clear and not too high (a condition they abominate), grayling are always to be caught upon the Lugg. Till almost this moment of going to press, I should have said with confidence that whether the wind is east or west, warm or cold, whether the skies are grey or sunny, you might count at the worst upon a basket of, say five pounds, including a pound or so of little fellows filling in the chinks, and retained for reasons already stated. I never fish dry for grayling myself, as it is I think seldom necessary. On the other hand, my friend and host on the river usually does, as he prefers it for its own sake. A grayling doesn't generally lie near the surface like a trout, but dashes up at the fly from near the bottom. Indeed, it is an axiom on the Lugg that the bigger grayling, those between one and two pounds, are more often caught by a deep-sunk fly fished down stream in the heavy pools. But the best ordinary grayling water is in the smooth, gentle glides from two to three feet deep which are so abundant on the Lugg between the pools and stony shallows.

It is no use pretending that the grayling is as shy or as hard to catch as the trout, when he means taking, for he is not by a long way. You may often, for example, see them lying in clear water and catch two or three with a wet fly. When they are really on the take, too, you may fish a streamy pool down and without moving kill three or four big grayling, the disturbance made in playing the first victim or victims

having no deterrent effect on the others. This indifference is of course much modified in clear, gliding water, but even then it is occasionally surprising how callous to disturbance a matured fish shows himself. I well remember how the grayling in a pool on the Teme, in the very last ten minutes of a long, weary, fruitless day after trout, saved in a measure the situation and transformed a practically empty basket into one that at any rate turned out handsomely upon a dish.

It was in that, for anglers, and indeed for some other people, awful summer of 1911, when I happened to be spending most of July in Ludlow, a sojourn I had much looked forward to as incidentally affording opportunities of trouting in many excellent and not unfamiliar streams. Among others was Lord Plymouth's admirable water on the Teme above Bromfield, and never having sampled it, I was looking forward all the more keenly to making its acquaintance. What a summer that was! Yet even in that gorgeous June before the parching time had come and turned the thirsty land to dust and ashes, the mayfly had more than half cheated us on the Lugg. Its waters had already dropped deplorably low, and the trout, failing the expected mayfly, regarded our smaller lures with exasperating indifference. A wet July and fresh water and revived fish seemed a certainty after all these rainless weeks. But not a bit of it! Every one remembers that July, so recent as it is, to say nothing of the succeeding August. Many of us, familiar with an American summer, felt for the first time in our lives that we were breathing and feeling day and night an American atmosphere in Great

Britain, while the landscape took on the colouring of Pennsylvania or Virginia in a dry season. It had done so, to be sure, in the five months' drought of 1893, now forgotten except by elderly farmers and anglers, but then without the great heat. It was not only, as it so turned out, that July fishing would have been absurd; that often happens, but the very idea had a sense of repulsion about it that I never felt before in England and never expect to feel again. One heard, and heard truly, that trout and salmon were dying in some rivers. 1913 in Wales and the Marches was bad enough, but what water there was left at least remained cool. The shrunken streams of 1911 looked positively oily, and had not been washed out for months. I felt I could not have brought myself to eat a fish out of the briskest of them as the parching summer dragged on its semi-tropical, un-English course into the autumn. My last day in the neighbourhood, the second of August, had come, and not a line had I even dreamed of wetting. But I was so anxious to have a look at this portion of the Teme that I overcame my distaste and determined to exercise my long-hoarded privilege. Trout were the ostensible object of pursuit, for the grayling were not yet quite ready.

It proved, of course, rather a pitiful business: the jaded, cracking meadow-banks, the tired foliage, the stuffy air, the thin, warm streams, the weary, lifeless pools, the insufferable flies that made any rest for the weary angler impossible even with a pipe. At the end of a longish day of hard fishing, for the simple reason that repose was impossible, I had as the result a brace of half-pound trout, and considered that I was

fortunate in having even so much in the basket. The sun was just setting, and as I had some miles to cycle home, I was reeling up my line, thinking what a fool I was at my time of life to go toiling all day long in such an atmosphere at such a hopeless job, when I noticed there was one nice rocky pool still stirring quite briskly just below, the very last, as it so happened, on the water there available. As I could spare another five minutes I strolled down and cast wearily and mechanically into its head. Almost immediately, to my amazement, a good fish took me, and for a few seconds I thought I was into a trout, but it turned out to be a three-quarter-pound grayling. To shorten my story, I took seven grayling, one after another, in that rather limited pool, and as they were all about the same size, and were now legally just in season, they were under such parlous circumstances extraordinarily welcome. For I was in no mood to be critical. It isn't often given to one, after say seven hours and three-quarters' fishing, to turn a one-pound into a six-pound basket in the next quarter of an hour, and in the very last fishable spot!

As half an hour later, at dusk, I crossed the still sweltering, drowsy market-place to my quarters, I encountered a local friend and expert angler standing in light attire and trying to cool off after a hot day in his office. 'Fishing,' said he; 'good Lord! I needn't ask if you 've done anything.' I happened to be carrying the basket in my hand, and passed the strap into his outstretched grasp. Down went his arm, of course, with the quite respectable weight, and out of his mouth proceeded some brief emphatic testimony,

to his frank amazement. It was getting dark, and when he opened the lid, as I had put the trout at the top, he took the rest for granted, for the grayling had hardly yet come into consideration. 'Confound it!' he said, 'you must be a conjurer.' And being the professor he was, he may well have been staggered seeing the abnormal fishing famine that then prevailed. I left it at that, resumed the basket, said good-night, and passed on in a state of semi-exhaustion to much-needed food and repose. I didn't see my friend again, as I departed next day. We had constantly shot in company in old days, but never fished together, and I have no doubt his opinion of my prowess in the latter department is of a most unduly exalted kind. The incident was the more curious as the grayling isn't much of an evening fish. The morning, even in warm weather, is usually his most responsive time.

Ludlow and the Teme are associated in my mind with another pleasant, and indeed much pleasanter, dry-weather surprise. It was some five years before the trifling incident just related, when I was staying in that delightful and, as I always maintain, æsthetically unrivalled town, during a hot and dry August. Fishing, as a matter of fact, was not greatly in my mind on this occasion. Nor, indeed, is that sulky month calculated to stir an angler's cravings, at any rate outside a mountain or a chalk-stream country. Nor again did I at that time know personally any of the surrounding waters. Moreover, the neighbourhood of Ludlow is so rich in scenes of natural beauty, and in antiquities of abounding interest, that if you are anything at all besides a fisherman there is little

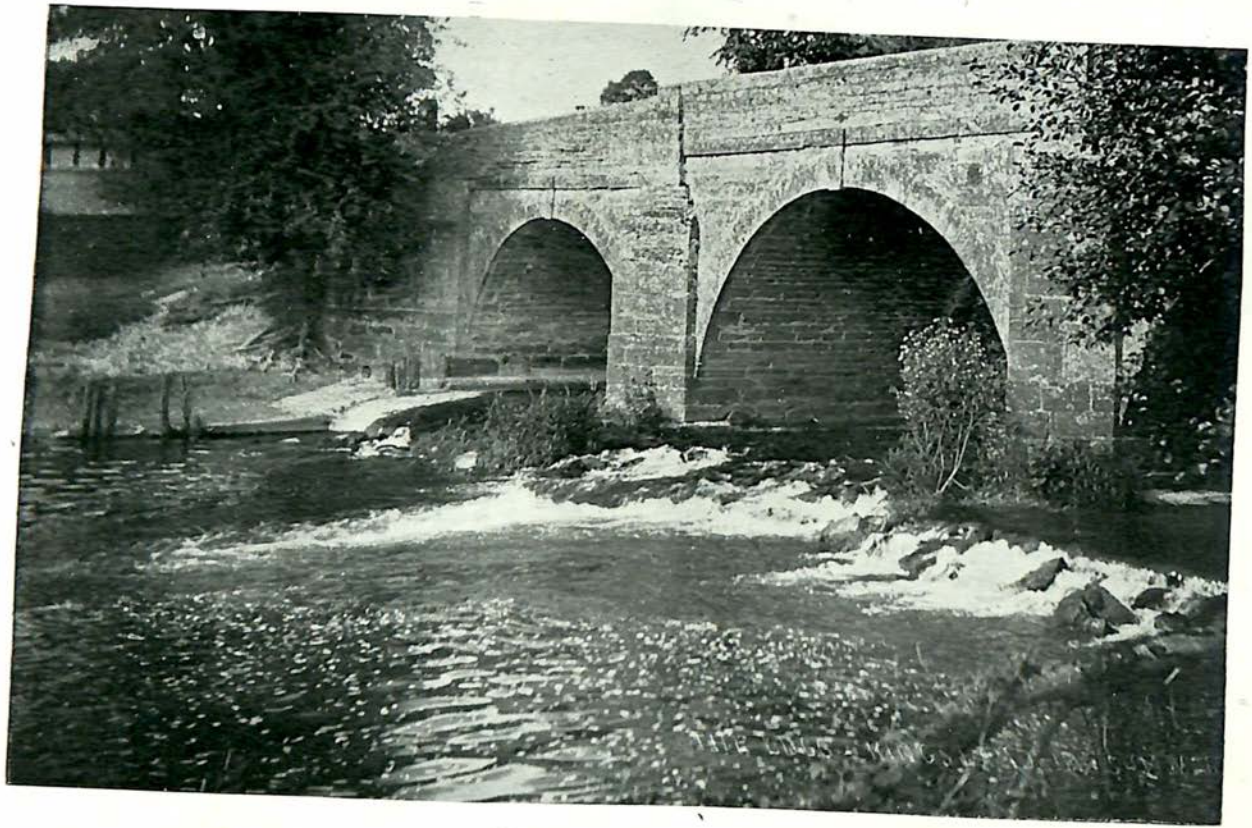
cause to quarrel with fine summer weather. On this occasion we found ourselves in the ordinary course of such things quartered beneath the roof of anything but an ordinary couple. The man had been a shoemaker, but any one further removed from the conventional notion of that sedentary, radically inclined type of humanity I never met. His wife, a strong, dark, rather masterful woman, had been a substantial farmer's daughter. They were, as in due course transpired, a quite devoted but childless couple, and at that time, with the aid, I think, of a little competency, lived by letting lodgings. These last were redeemed from some obvious disadvantages by the civilising atmosphere of much good old furniture and a most glorious view from the window right up the valley to the Stretton hills. To be frank, we were a little put off by the lady till we recognised the sterling qualities that lay behind her rather disconcerting bluntness; while our landlord, who was both modest and gracious, so rarely emerged from the subterranean quarters which they inhabited beneath our feet that it was a little time before we discovered his qualities —and hers. The fact was that both of them, as I afterwards found, were consumed with a passion for everything associated with country life, though now caged, cabined, and confined in the rather uncongenial atmosphere of narrow precincts in a country town. The man was then in somewhat indifferent health, and we were sensibly touched by the way in which the strong and, to us, offhand lady took the burdens of life off his hands.

Now it so happened that I had been granted a couple

of days, whenever I chose to take them, in the Downton Castle water on the Teme—no little of a privilege, as I afterwards realised, and in those days, at any rate, not very readily conceded. I knew nothing at all of the water, and in a persistently dry August, which showed no sign of a change, held my prospective advantages somewhat cheaply. However, it was but ordinarily dry weather, not an American summer, as in the case of 1911, so after a few days I thought I would make my first trial of the water, and at any rate explore the river. It was only when I disclosed to them the fact of my permit and my intentions that I came to realise the true inwardness of my landlord and his spouse, or, I should rather say, of my landlady and her husband. The one ceased to be the rather blunt personage who took orders for meals, laid the table, and presented the bill; the other changed altogether from the gentle being who crept up from the basement occasionally for a few seconds with an armful of extremely well-cleaned boots. Both in short got pleasurably excited, and I discovered that not only was the man a keen angler, as well as most other kindred things, but that the lady was too. Nor was this all, for both of them, through some keeper connection, had actually fished this sacred water many times in former days. The atmosphere now lightened all over the house. Domestic things went cheerily instead of rather drowsily. I might, perhaps, be a duffer they thought, but I was at any rate a fisherman.

My rod had hitherto been concealed, I think, among sticks, golf clubs, and umbrellas, and other accessories not unpacked. It was indeed pretty hopeless weather

in the most hopeless month. But the quality of the fishing was such, my friends opined, that even a benighted stranger from a far country—for it is thus the locals are apt to rate one—might pick up a fish or two. The excellent couple gave me quite a send-off. The good man, full of new-born zeal, strapped my waders, brogues, and rod on to the bicycle himself, and the lady showed more personal interest in cutting sandwiches than she had ever done in serving up dinner for four people, though the dinners were all right. And they both stood at the door at my departure and bestowed their blessings, so to speak, on my enterprise. Excellent souls, their hearts, of course, went with me, and they would both have given their eyes to have been in my place. I felt I must do something to justify all this fervour, though there seemed mighty little prospect of it. In fact, I felt something of a fool thus loaded up for fishing on such a day, with a bright August sun above my head and two inches of dust on the road beneath my feet. In such self-conscious mood, I fancied I could detect a pitying smile on the face of every wayfarer above a tramp that passed me on the Shrewsbury road, and was quite relieved to turn off at Bromfield and pursue the less-frequented route that follows the high ground above the valley of the Teme to Leintwardine—name familiar enough in angling gossip and literature for its famous fishing club. I had got my bearings from my hosts, but it is a difficult country on first acquaintance, the hills are high and the vale woody and deep; but eventually I found my way on foot down to the bottom of the preserve marked by an



LUGG BRIDGE, KINGSLAND

abandoned mill, and in some broken water there at once killed a half-pound trout.

Moving up I soon found myself in the castle park, and upon characteristic Teme water, ill adapted to a bright August day—thin shallows and long, glassy pools, with no sign of a fish moving. I was a little sad when, after an hour or two of bootless endeavour, I sat down to eat my hostess's carefully made sandwiches on the bridge at the top of the park. I could see nothing ahead of me, for the river came breaking with refreshing energy out of a densely wooded gorge just above. It was in the afternoon when I actually got up into this tangle, that I began to understand my entertainers' enthusiasm, and when I began to catch fish I understood it still more. This is assuredly a wonderful mile or so for a gentle purling, rippling river like the Teme, and seems nothing less than a freak of nature. For leaving the placid streams and pools of Leintwardine the Teme has here to force its way through a high limestone ridge, and is transformed for the time into a Welsh mountain river; plunging over rocks, seething in dark pools, spreading out again into wide but fishable shallows, broken by long ledges into tempting eddies, or again gliding swift and smooth under mossy cliffs. This is in truth a place as meet for the artist's brush as for the angler's fly. Trees of every variety planted a century ago by the celebrated horticulturists who then owned the soil, overhung the river and thickly draped the steep sides of the glen. The August sunshine, too, was sensibly tempered up here amid the shady foliage. Cool draughts, laden betimes with spray, breathed

down the rocky flumes, while the low state of the water was less noticeable among these rugged channels. And, best of all, the trout proved superior to the conventions of their kind on such a day at such a season. In brief, I picked up, that afternoon, seven brace of nice, even trout, half-pounders and third of a pounders.

When I got home that evening my sporting hosts almost embraced me. The pleasure my comparative—and perhaps, by them, unlooked for—success gave them was a very different thing from the benevolent gratification of the ordinary landlord or landlady that their guest is enjoying himself, and will come again or recommend them to his friends. There was nothing of that here. I had to tell them the exact spots where I had caught each fish, and what flies had taken, with every detail, and then I had their own experiences and those of others in past days on the water which, under good conditions and in the right season, must in truth be a grand bit of wet-fly fishing. As the weather showed no signs of improvement I went up again the next day but one, missed all the park water this time, and fished the gorge up stream twice over, and brought back eight or nine brace of nice sizeable fish, which established me more firmly than ever in the good graces of this estimable couple. This new attitude extended to the rest of our party, and things were quite different for the remainder of our stay. The gentleman no longer crept up from below and left only the boots at the top of the stairs, but if I was about lingered long in the hall and poured out his heart on the things that, next to his wife, held possession of it.

As regards the latter, so far from a severely business attitude while spreading our board, tales of modest experiences by flood and field, but the more genuine for their limitations, sometimes interfered with strict punctuality. For this worthy pair were not only addicted to rods but to firearms. The lady had a rifle of her own and, according to her admiring spouse, could knock over rabbits with unerring aim. Their opportunities, poor things, were now woefully restricted. They had little truck, I think, with their neighbours, and seemed sufficient unto themselves with their dreams of fields and woods and streams, for both were naturalists in their way. Not entirely dreams though, even then, for there were friendly farmers about in the neighbourhood with rabbits, wood pigeons, and the chance of an occasional crack at a partridge or pheasant, who knows? And let the better-placed reader who has never knocked one over without a game licence throw the first stone. These were red letters in the year to be looked forward to and treasured afterwards. And sometimes the lady went too and took her rifle along.

They astonished me one day by the remark that 'deer shooting' opened on such and such a date, and that my gentleman was looking to his gun in readiness for the campaign. This sounded something tremendous, mysterious, and even criminal, and no wonder! But the explanation proved simple, though interesting, since, I believe, the situation is unique in England. For in the near neighbourhood of Ludlow there rises a range of lofty hills, clad for miles with dense unbroken woodland—the scene, in fact, of Milton's *Comus*, which

he wrote at Ludlow. Throughout these forests fallow deer have roamed in a wild state for generations, and are accounted as *feræ naturæ*. They are not very often visible, and, of course, the woods are preserved on other accounts, but the deer sometimes wander at night or early morning on to the surrounding farms, where they may, I believe, be lawfully shot by the occupants. Hence my friend in the surprising character of a deer-stalker! The end of the story up to date of this singular couple must surely be told, as it is a pleasant one. When next in Ludlow, two or three years later, I lost no time in looking them up, but encountered to my disappointment a strange face at the door, and found that my friends had flitted, to some place in the country, their successors believed, but were vague as to locality. This was surely as it should be, and eventually I tracked them down a mile or two out of the town, in a roomy, picturesque cottage on a by-lane at the edge of the big woods. I think they were pleased to see me, and for their part seemed at last in their true element, with twenty acres of fine grass-land, a good garden and orchard, pigs, poultry, a few beasts, and all the rest of it. Monsieur was happy in recovered health, and madam had lost none of hers, nor yet of her eloquence on things of the open air. She had a cheerful, snug sitting-room further embellished with her nice old furniture, and let it occasionally to a summer visitor in search of quiet and a serene Arcadian atmosphere.

I was talking not long ago to a land agent I happened to know who had just been appointed to the charge of a great estate, which incidentally contained

four miles of excellent rapid-water trouting with the owner non-resident. The agent, though otherwise a sportsman, was no angler, but he had sound and benevolent ideas as to giving local people the preference in regard to the two or three days a year permission he proposed to grant to a reasonable number of applicants. He was quite liberal, sensible, and well-intentioned. 'The trouble is,' he said, 'to fit them in,' and turning to his notes remarked, 'Here, for instance, Jones wants to come on the 10th, and so does Brown, which is awkward. And now, what days would *you* like? (I was a candidate, and though not a local, had some equivalent claim). I have Thompson down for the 14th and 17th.' 'I don't care a hang,' I replied, 'so far as I am concerned, whether Brown, Jones, or Thompson are fishing the water concurrently. There is plenty of room for half a dozen rods, to say nothing of a couple in four miles, and I am quite certain that these other individuals, if they are fishermen of reasonable knowledge and sanity, will be of the same mind. I don't want four miles all to myself. On the contrary, it would be far more interesting to me if there were one or two other rods out.' I don't think my friend saw it, though; I don't suppose he ever will, but will continue, no doubt quite conscientiously, to give himself no end of superfluous trouble, as well as frequently to inconvenience many of his beneficiaries.

This naming of days is in truth an absurdity, and most unfair to the nominees, unless, of course, it is a very small stretch, which is rarely the case when these formalities are necessary and tickets printed. The

water may be in flood or under a rasping east wind. Give a man his one or two days at discretion within, say, a fortnight, if a limit is necessary. If any inconvenience should arise, which is most unlikely, that is surely the angler's not the owner's look-out. The former, I am sure, would far sooner take such remote chances of undue congestion than be tied to a hopeless day or days, as if a river were a pheasant cover or a golf-course. It doesn't cost anything to be merely sensible! Moreover, if A fishes the top mile, and B the middle, and C the lower (say half-mile, if you like) from ten o'clock on, or whatever mutual arrangements they may agree upon, the water is presumably covered only twice in a day by a single rod, and what does that amount to? Nothing at all!—particularly as trout usually rise only during periods, not through the whole day.

Ludlow, to my thinking, is the noblest country town in England, for its blend of stately pose and old-world charm. There are streets perhaps in some other towns quainter, and as full or even fuller of ancient dwellings, though Ludlow has still some sixty or seventy half-timbered houses which mere stripping would expose in all their pristine beauty. But it isn't such detail alone that gives character to the south Shropshire town, but a combination rather of everything that makes for distinction, pose, antiquity, beauty of surroundings and historic atmosphere. The lines of the place, too, are finely laid. The streets are wide and slope upwards from a narrow river valley, charming in itself, with quick waters and embowering woods, to the noblest parish church on the Border,

and one of the greatest and most imposing mediæval castles in England. There is everywhere the pleasant, unsmirched atmosphere of a clean market-town, and the picturesque intermingling of foliage with buildings which suggests space and elbow-room. East of the high-pitched town, dominated by its hoary and massive castle, the sharp peaks of the Clee hills spring up close at hand to a height of seventeen hundred feet. While behind it on the west, directly from the river, there rise to a thousand feet or more those beautifully wooded ranges already alluded to, where the wild fallow-deer roam unseen in luxuriant undulations of wood and glade. From the foot of the town and castle hill, spreading northward more or less, are the valleys of the Teme, the Onny, and the Corve, with Wenlock Edge, Caradoc, and the high Church Stretton range bounding the horizon.

It is only fitting that Ludlow should look its part, since it was the official capital of Wales and the Marches through the whole Tudor and Stuart periods, and its castle as the then seat of government is a good deal more than the mere mighty relic of ancient border strife. Nor is there, I think, a place in all England where within a radius of twenty odd miles so much that is æsthetically beautiful in the way of village and manor-house architecture, combined with noble ecclesiastical and feudal relics of a former day, is set off by natural scenery of a kind that infinitely helps to impress such things upon the imagination. No angler with a particle of taste need be at a loss here even in a dry spell.

The Onny is a pretty little trout stream with

grayling in its lower portions, and joins the Teme at Bromfield, already mentioned as some three miles above Ludlow. It rises in Radnorshire, and follows the little branch railroad from Bishop's Castle to Craven Arms Junction down a winding, picturesque, and narrow valley. At Craven Arms there is a comfortable hotel on the river bank with some fishing privileges for trout and grayling. But the upper Onny, and what is generally known as the Plowden water, being the property of that ancient Roman Catholic family, the Plowdens of Plowden, whose beautiful Tudor manor-house stands above the stream, has been held ever since I first knew it, some thirty years ago, by a small club. This, however, is a more or less local body with certain hospitable clauses, which have been kindly exercised in my favour on various occasions. The Onny is a bewitching little stream, particularly above Craven Arms and the grayling stretches, though, like the Teme and all its tributaries, it is afflicted with the intrusive chub. The chub has not a particle of restraint in his composition, nor the faintest sense of propriety. He is an out-and-out vulgarian, a rank 'climber.' Unlike other coarse fish who push into trout, grayling, and salmon waters, he thrusts himself into every corner of them. Regardless of his plebeian qualities, his gross body, unpalatable flesh, and lubberly antics, when he has seized your fly and spoiled a pool, he usurps the hovers of the rightful denizens of the stream. He doesn't stick to the heavy waters and muddy bottoms, but will assert himself as often as not in the very best fly water. Nay, from the Wye particularly, where he is even more of a curse,

he will ascend the mountain streams of Wales and thrust his ugly head up in clear rocky waters where his presence is neither more nor less than an outrage. He is an interesting and valuable personality sucking in flies beneath a willow on the Thames or Ouse; but up in this country no one wants him a bit: he is an abomination.

The Onny is not rated in the same class as a trout stream with the Teme or Lugg, nice little river though it be, and withal pleasant to fish. The trout, moreover, run small in the Plowden water, mainly about four to the pound. I only remember once catching them really on the rise, and that was my very first day on the water, an April one, considerably over twenty years ago. It would certainly not be worth recalling, but for a rather curious incident connected with it. I was staying with an old friend in the neighbourhood, and I use the prefix advisedly, seeing that he dates back to the juvenile pike adventure of the first chapter in this very county of Salop. Two tickets for the Plowden water had been given us, so my friend's son, then aged about twenty, and I drove over one morning to make use of them. I always noticed in those days that Shropshire men, north of Ludlow at any rate, used very large flies for their generally rather small streams and their certainly not large trout. My young friend, when we fixed up our rods on the banks of the Onny, proved a true Salopian, and attached to his cast two or three flies that, though of serviceable dressing, seemed to me quite monstrous in size. He was an excellent fisherman though, having been bred up one, with every advantage. I

expressed surprise, but did not of course venture more, being then almost a stranger to the locality. For all that, I myself mounted a small orange dun of the Dee pattern, which insect during the previous fortnight on that noble river I had found, as I have often found since, extremely killing. Thereupon we parted till lunch-time to fish separate parts of the stream, and just as I was commencing operations the keeper turned up. He confessed himself a fisherman, so I broached the question of flies, and he inspected my cast mounted with the small orange dun and some other flies of the same calibre. 'These are no good, sir,' said he; 'you will never do anything with them here, they are far too small. Here are the flies we use.' Whereupon he pulled out his book and exhibited some samples like my young friend's, and far larger than anything I had ever used or seen used for brook trout. In spite of the fixed local tradition, for which, as a rule, I have a profound respect, I rejected his offer of some, though not without qualms, and stuck to the small duns, which, as a matter of fact, were of normal size as things are now accounted. We parted, and I began to catch fish at once. When I had finished my stretch of water about sandwich-time, I had eighteen or twenty trout in my basket, so I reeled up and returned to the agreed-upon midday trysting-place, thinking what a fine lot we should have between us by evening. On my way I encountered a strange angler, who began at once to curse the heavens above and the waters beneath and everything he could think of for the poor sport he was having. I asked to see his flies, which proved to be,

as I expected, the local pattern of almost sea-trout size. Better still, the keeper was with him, and this our second interview was interesting! So when I met my young friend again I was less astonished than I should otherwise have been to find that he, too, was calling on all his gods to show cause why the fish on such a propitious-looking day had only offered up a single victim to his efforts. I felt emboldened now to tell him I was perfectly certain what the trouble was, and after lunch persuaded him—and, indeed, the thing being too obvious, he needed little inducement—to put up one of my orange duns, for I think I had killed nearly all my fish on it. To shorten Part I. of the story, for there is a sequel, the trout continued, if with slightly modified eagerness, to take the orange dun through the afternoon, during which we had almost exactly the same number of fish to our respective credits, which was as it should be.

I have hinted above at a sequel. For a day or two afterwards it was suggested that I should fish an obscure but good little stream, which flows down under Wenlock Edge to the Onny. There was no road to it, so we had to walk across country, and my host himself, the son being otherwise engaged, though a mighty Nimrod, not at all a keen fisherman, kindly offered to go with me. For the owner was, I think, a pernickety customer, who would just concede an occasional day to a neighbour, but would have thrown bricks, unhesitatingly, at a neighbour's guest unaccompanied. It was a very bushy, sequestered little stream, unnamed on the map, but held quite nice trout, and I should imagine was rarely fished. My

host, deeply concerned all his life with everything connected with the countryside, had never, I am sure he will not mind me saying, taken fishing seriously. And it was all the nicer of him to give up half of his busy day and tramp with rod and basket over hills and dales that I might indulge my fancy unmolested. Of course, he put up a cast of the overgrown Shropshire patterns, and as I felt he was only fishing to keep me company, it didn't seem to matter. While I as naturally put up my normally sized flies, with no doubt an orange dun on this occasion as leader.

After an hour or two of hard but futile up-stream fishing among alder-bushes for one solitary trout, I gave it up and set out in quest of my companion in a rather penitent frame of mind for bringing him all this way to so little purpose. To my surprise, however, I found him enjoying himself amazingly. Indeed, he was just landing a nice trout as I got up to him, and had seven or eight shapely herring-sized fish already in his basket. I don't mind admitting after this lapse of years, though I often go to see him still, and I doubt if he has ever fished since, that I felt deeply humiliated. Where now was the orange dun? and why had I, an ardent and professed fisherman, caught practically nothing? Why, indeed? for I had laboured assiduously. But the cup even yet was not quite full. 'It must be the flies,' he said; and if that, under the circumstances, was any consolation, he was absolutely right, as was very soon proven. For he himself had to be off home for an engagement, but his conscience was now clear regarding the owner, and it was now considered safe and proper for

me to remain as long as I chose. 'Give me your rod,' said I in my abasement, 'just as it is.' And I took it, salmon-flies, as they seemed to me, and all, and he departed. I began rising and catching fish at once, and soon had half a dozen nice ones like those in my friend's basket, when they went off the feed altogether; and in due course I wended my way homeward, thinking furiously, but to no good purpose, I need hardly add.

Talking of these big trout-flies, then at any rate in vogue among Salopians, every one familiar with the line from Shrewsbury to Church Stretton and Hereford must know the Condover brook, named after the village and its famous Elizabethan mansion, so recently passed out of the Cholmondeley family. For its higher waters sport pleasantly among the meadows for several miles between the stations of Dorrington and Condover, where it turns an eastward course towards the Severn. It is quite a noted little trout stream, though from a train window even a practised bush fisherman might be apt to wonder how he could circumvent the alders which bristle so thick along its narrow course. I have often been invited to make the experiment by a friend in Shrewsbury who had rights upon it and fished it regularly. But the weather has always been prohibitive, for like the little girl of the nursery rhyme the moods of the Condover brook run to extremes, and when it is low it is very, very low, and, in short, impossible. But my friend used to show me the flies he used upon it, the very flies, in fact, which 'must be used,' and that the trout demanded should alone be offered. And these corresponded precisely in size withthosethat ha d so staggered

me elsewhere in Shropshire—once, as related, to my salvation, and once to my undoing. So in this state of perplexity I will leave this region of babbling brooks and return to the Herefordshire Lugg, where such monstrously overgrown red hackles and blue duns would, I am sure, be regarded with horror and amazement both by fishermen and fish.

It is curious what a liking Herefordshire grayling, at any rate, seem to have for very low water. In my experience, and the much more convincing one of anglers who live upon the Lugg, the more hopeless looking the conditions in this particular the brighter the prospect of a good basket. Of many Septembers in which I have fished this water, the only one which proved for the entire week a comparative failure was after the wet summer of 1912. Previously, each occasion had seemed worse in appearance than the last, yet the grayling, I may fairly say, took better and better with each succeeding autumn, till their partiality for a red tag and a mid-blue seemed to culminate in the great drought of 1911, when the river really did look absolutely hopeless to the ordinary eye. And no wonder, for hardly a drop of rain had fallen, or, to be precise, scarcely a drop of fresh water had run into the river since the preceding April. In the heart of Wales, west of the Wye, the fountains of the hills had been loosed in August and the mountain pastures were again fresh and green, and snowy wreaths of water were once more glistening against the long parched cliffs. But down in Herefordshire the streams were still almost voiceless in the deadly stupor of the drought of a century. In June we had

been mayfly fishing here, and even then praying for rain. It was now mid-September, and practically not a drop had fallen since. 'Come and have a try, but you can imagine what the river is like,' wrote my host, who had not wetted a line at home, I think, since we had wrestled together for a week of a (locally) vexatious mayfly season. I went for two days only on this occasion in anything but sanguine mood. I had not yet fathomed the true inwardness of the Lugg grayling, nor indeed had my friend himself, I fancy, at that time. For there is a big difference between ordinary low water and the conditions of 1911. On my arrival, however, I found a noble heap of freshly caught grayling lying on the hall table, the day's sport of two neighbours who were having tea in the drawing-room—the first experiment of the season, as it transpired. It so fell out that I had to fish both my days alone. On the first I had filled my basket by about half-past three, and could not carry any more; and on the second, taking it very easily, I had nearly as many by the ordinary reeling-up time. The river was so low too, that half of the places available in normal low water were unfishable, and at no time, owing to high banks and plentiful timber, is it easy, though always interesting, to fish.

Now comes the rather instructive sequel. The water the next year at the same season after the wet summer of 1912 was in most perfect order. The brilliant early autumn had begun. Yet that week was the only failure so far experienced. The first day, when the river was voted just a thought perhaps too full for ideal grayling conditions, I was out alone,

and did, to be sure, kill about six pounds. After that, better and better though the days apparently became and the finer the water, none of us could do anything. 'Grand weather for grayling,' we echoed every morning at breakfast. 'Fine grayling weather, sir,' said the coachman and the gardener. 'They 'll be a-goin' to-day, sure to be,' said the keeper (who was never known to make superfluous or optimistic remarks). The road-mender, the old-age pensioner who brooded much of the day (and small blame to him, for it is a charming spot upon Lugg bridge) with less authority, said the same thing. Thus, too, echoed the sporting publican from Kingsland, who, of course, pulls his trap up on it if any one is fishing. 'Fine grayling weather,' said one and all. Of course they did; the thing was as obvious as the bright serenity of the weather itself, as obvious as Kingsland church tower, with the far-away line of the Black Mountains behind it. But the grayling themselves didn't think so, though in our meagre baskets we generally had two or three very handsome trout, and naturally enough after such a continued orgy of high feeding, even still in good condition.

I remember, too, how a year or so previously two of those trifling but curious incidents that occur to most of us perhaps once in a lifetime, happened simultaneously on this water. A swallow taking one's fly is too usual a thing to be worthy of mention, but on this particular occasion, just as my line had straightened out before falling on the water, one dashed into it, and by a movement so instantaneous as to be imperceptible, was fluttering hopelessly entangled in

the line about two feet above the cast. It had twisted the former so many times and so intricately about its little wing joints and neck, that its release from bondage proved quite a business, though its action had been so rapid as scarcely to disturb the straight line from the rod point to the tail fly. When I got into the next field I found my companion for the day, and our host who was with him, but not fishing himself, full of another strange thing that had just happened. In a corner pool, unduly small from the tribute just here levied by a mill-stream, a pound trout had seized a small grayling which had taken the angler's fly, and stuck to it with such extraordinary tenacity that several times it was brought almost out of water on to the shelving beach. Unfortunately a little boy who was carrying the landing-net had selected that moment to embark on some adventure of his own, and was nowhere to be seen. If the net had been there the trout would have been landed to a certainty. As it was, our host very nearly kicked it out on to the beach with his foot, though it was not hooked in any way, but merely had its jaws in the grayling, and either could not, or more likely would not, relax them.

There is a charming bit of woodland vista just below Lugg bridge, down which the river makes a bright and sparkling journey over a stony bed between the foliage to the quiet pools and glides beyond it. This is the only place I ever remember seeing five kingfishers on the wing at once, and that, too, on several occasions, though the Lugg is a favourite haunt of this most beautiful of British birds. It was the year of the great drought and the Coronation, and we saw them every

day while mayfly fishing. The colouring and luxuriance of the early summer of that memorable season is as unforgettable as the parching weariness of its later months. And I well remember how the sunlit radiancy of this procession of scudding kingfishers, following the old bird, showed up against the fresh, lustrous foliage of their woody background, as again and again they flashed backwards and forwards. In the grayling season they were still there, the whole brood of them stronger on the wing perhaps, and still more gorgeous of plumage. But the freshness of that June foliage mantling upon the bank and quivering in many coloured radiancy on the quick transparent water, had vanished, and somehow the kingfishers didn't look quite the same. Perhaps there was less opportunity for admiring Nature. There was certainly less occasion for falling back upon her consolations, for the grayling kept us materially contented and very busy, whereas the trout that year had supplied us with long interludes for reflection as well as many periods of exasperation. We amused ourselves betimes, too, in watching through strong binoculars the demeanour of the fish we could not catch. The dry-fly purist, I have no doubt, spends much time at this, and extracts from it many precious truths. I found it most fascinating, not merely from the intimacy on which it placed one with the elusive object of our quest, but for the beauty of the gliding water thus magnified and illumined by the sun's rays. I got no nearer catching the fish, however. On the contrary, the amount of food, winged and wingless, which passed by unnoticed, as revealed through a strong glass,

and withal the impossibility of even then identifying the tiny morsel which every now and again it selected from the mass of stuff that came down, was disheartening. It was interesting, too, watching the fish over which a small dry-fly was being cast by my companion : the first slight movements of languid interest, as the tempting-looking imitation fell or floated over his nose, and then the contemptuous shrug of the shoulders, and, finally, the utter callousness displayed at all further attempts.

So many anglers have never even seen a grayling, it may be worth stating that it belongs to the trout and salmon family, its larger scales, smaller mouth and teeth, and big dorsal fin being the chief distinguishing characteristics. Its fighting powers when in condition, particularly, I think, when about half a pound in weight, are about equal to a trout of the same size. In a mixed river amid lively waters it is not always easy to tell at first which you have hooked. Usually the dorsal fin coming above water, or the purplish look it gives to the back, is the first sign, and if in the trouting season causes, of course, a pang of disappointment. It is surprising, however, in a river full of grayling, how little one sees of them during that period. Their domestic arrangements are the precise converse of the trout, spawning as they do in the spring, and coming into condition in September and October when the water seems again peopled with them, and the trout take a back seat, and to the eye almost cease to exist. This makes a river where they really flourish together without mutual disagreement, and both show sport in their season, greatly to be desired. There is no

doubt, however, that when on the take they are much easier to kill and much less shy than trout. On the table they greatly resemble the latter. I should say that a grayling was the equal of an average trout, though not trout of the best class, such as those, for instance, out of rocky mountain streams. But the Lugg grayling are generally regarded by those who have the best opportunities for comparison as equal in October to the Lugg trout of June, which is also white-fleshed.

After leaving Leominster, to pursue a course of some twenty miles towards its junction with the Wye below Hereford, through flat meadows for the most part, the Lugg gradually, I think, deteriorates as a trout stream, though the fish perhaps get heavier. But neither they nor the grayling rise so freely, and I fancy the coarse fish begin to get some hold. But whenever I cross it at Lugwardine, or again, travelling south by road from Hereford to Ross, stand on the bridge at Mordiford just above its junction with the Wye, it appears to me a different river from the buoyant stream of Kingsland and Mortimer's Cross. And looking back up the wide, flat meadows, I always feel that it has seen its best days from every point of view, and that it is full time it should merge its waters in the most beautiful of all English and Welsh rivers.

In the cottage in the orchard by Lugg bridge where the keeper now lives, there dwelt for many years a well-known character, fisherman and fly-tier. Sequestered spot though it be, he sent his flies all over this border country, and had clients, I believe, in other parts of England. An accomplished angler himself,

he seems to have been in request as companion on fishing excursions far beyond the bounds of his native waters. His widow moved into a roomy ancient house standing in a considerable garden in the neighbouring village of Kingsland. The venerable dame told me she got it at a low rent by reason of its extreme antiquity. It contained some quite capacious handsome rooms with carved mantels, and being kept beautifully clean, and withal suitably furnished, was most attractive. I lay there one night, and it was not till I went aloft to bed that I began to perceive the mystery of the landlord's moderation. For the ascent from the door to the head of the bed and the dressing-table was so precipitous that, with only a bottle of cider to my credit, it took careful climbing on the oak floor to accomplish the feat, and when I had to make the return trip in the morning I felt greatly moved to sit down and toboggan it. I don't know what the age of that house can be. Jasper Tudor might well have occupied it his last night on earth before the battle!

It was Coronation Day that on this occasion, after weeks of dry weather, broke cloudy and drizzly. I was fishing that morning, and never felt in such an awkward predicament in my life. The very notion of rain at such a moment was unthinkable, yet under any other conceivable conditions I should have been on my knees praying that the threatening clouds might break. Happily, I can honestly swear that I repelled with disgust unworthy and insidious thoughts, and rejoiced as heartily as the parson and the schoolmaster when the great flag on the church tower at

midday caught the rays of the returning sun, and the dim clamour of loyal rustics was wafted even to the river-side.

The trout peradventure were celebrating the occasion under water in their own way, for a drizzly night and morning had made them sullener than even on the preceding day, so I had plenty of time for reflection, and my thoughts at such a moment naturally turned to that tremendous conflict on these quiet fields which brought about another coronation four and a half centuries ago. Gone are the barons of these Welsh marches who, more than any other feudal chieftains of their day, made and unmade kings. Gone are the Mortimers, the Lacys, the de Braoses, and the Clares; Wigmore and Richard's castle, Goderich and Abergavenny, Grosmont and Skenfrith are but shattered ruins. Ludlow alone, by virtue of its later and viceregal significance, still frowns roofless but immense over the once bloodstained land.

So it was no hardship to reel up and hurry back to Ludlow, whence on this occasion I had come, and do a portion of my duty at any rate in standing by the big bonfire on the heights above the ancient town, and beneath an umbrella for the only time of that whole summer. Alas! we had hoped to see the flare from many a noble height—from the Clee, from Caradoc, from the Long Mynd and the Wrekin—but all was murk, though our own bonfire blazed to heaven and mocked at the falling rain. Then, at any rate, it was permissible for farmers and fishermen to pray for its continuance. But, as everybody knows, these prayers were unheard; and, as I have said more

than once, when, months afterwards, I returned to the Lugg to be revenged, as it so happened, upon the autumn grayling the ill-behaviour of the June trout, not a drop had fallen in the interval.

I have always been not a little surprised that so few outsiders ever penetrate the beautiful vale of Llanthony watered by the clear rapid streams of the little river Honddu. The small hostelry of the Queen's Head, when not pre-empted by the members of the two clubs who hold the lower half of the river, is available for bed and board, and its landlord used to rent upon his own account two or three miles of excellent fishing over the mountain on the upper Monnow. But five miles up this lovely and sequestered Honddu valley stand the noble ruins of Llanthony Priory, presenting as perfect a picture of mediæval art set amid an inspiring uplifted solitude as can be found in all England. Moreover, portions of the old monkish quarters have been kept habitable, and now this long time have been doing unique duty as a very comfortable inn. The roomy living rooms and kitchen are those inhabited by the monks of old. You squeeze upwards by spiral stone stairways to your chamber in turret or gable, whence you can watch the moonlight streaming over the roofless cloistered aisles without, and hear the owls hooting in the ivied arches. On three sides the Black Mountains lift their heathy tops some two thousand feet into the sky, and the Honddu sings in its bosky rocky channel below. As a practical item it may also be noted that the right of fishing over a considerable stretch of the stream attaches to the Priory, and that as a place of sojourn it is, or was,

materially comfortable as well as æsthetically satisfying. But the man who would fish the Honddu, whether on the club water by favour of a member, or on the higher parts from the Priory Inn, must be at home in timber, for much of it is thickly fringed with brush. Hereford, Monmouth, and Brecon so interlace their borders here, to say nothing of recent boundary readjustments, it is not easy up in this lovely corner of all three, even were it worth while, to take count of such things. But at any rate it is safe to say that within living memory there were natives of the county of Hereford in this sequestered corner who were speaking Welsh as their mother tongue.

## VI

## THE ELAN LAKES AND WILD SOUTH WALES

I AM always glad to remember that I had at least a glimpse of those two beautiful and sequestered vales of the Elan and the Claerwen before the needs and enterprise of Birmingham submerged them. But if the murky metropolis of the Midlands has created a transformation scene, that scene is still one of beauty and purity—nay, even of seclusion, peace, and romance. For the wild hills, the craggy mountain steeps, that in former days dipped into narrow ribbon-like vales of green meadow fringed with indigenous oak, and dotted at intervals with a snug homestead or a water-mill, now cast their shadows everywhere upon the surface of broad and brimming waters. From the great dam at the foot of all, a veritable Niagara in high water, wedged between the imposing rugged heights of Cwm Toyddwr, the connecting lakes push back some three miles up the Claerwen valley to the west, and more than twice that distance up the Elan to the north. There are three other dams, for there are four lakes, and the plash of those great lace-like veils of falling water, over a hundred feet in height, is virtually the only sound that breaks the silence of

the hills. For resident humanity, sparse enough up here even in former days, is now of course scarcer still. It is not wanted, for obvious reasons; nor is boat or craft of any kind allowed upon these waters, whose extent is such that they could hardly be circumvented by a walk of much less than twenty miles. What makes so conspicuously for their charm, too, is the boldness of much of the scenery amid which they have been stored, and the wildness of it all. The mouth of the valley opens out through the mountains that enclose the most beautiful portions of the upper Wye. The lakes run back within the fringe of that mountain wilderness which spreads through the heart of South and Central Wales, and that practically no man outside it knows, and wherein but very few indeed abide.

'South Wales? Dear me,' says one's table neighbour, 'is it pretty? Of course, I know North Wales, but I thought South Wales was all coal mines.' *Is it pretty* and *coal mines*! Great heavens! What have the lands of Dyfed, of Ceredigion, of Brecheiniog done that they should suffer such a blighted reputation, for the opulent province of Morganwg whose smoking mountains, once as fair as any, frown across the Severn sea at Exmoor? What, too, about Radnor and Carmarthen, Pembroke and Cardigan?

'Sir or madam,' I always reply, and I fear sometimes with a little heat, 'the bulk of North Wales, together with the English Lake Country, are of course incomparable in this island south of the Scottish Highlands. They stand alone. But next to these I would have you know that Breconshire, coupled

inevitably with Radnor, so much are they interlocked, ranks easily next.'

'I thought Dev——'

'Yes, of course you did, because its extremely articulate and patriotic sons have been booming it in admirable and picturesque prose and verse for fifty years. And railroads, London journalists, and tourists have responded to the boom. With a public that for the most part knows nothing of its own country, this has been easily developed into a sort of cult. It is the only county of semi-mountain class outside the Welsh marches, and south of Yorkshire or Derbyshire. For Cornwall inside its seacoast need not be taken count of in such company.'

Devonshire as a whole is a beautiful and lovable county, but considerable slices of it, as we noticed in a former chapter, are undeniably commonplace of aspect, even to the verge of ugliness. Now Brecon-shire *cum* Radnor does not, I really think, contain a dull or a commonplace square mile. Its mountains reach an altitude of nearly three thousand feet—the height, that is, of Cader Idris and Helvellyn. They are often, too, of shapely make, and sometimes of rugged summit and precipitous face. In all the streams of Devon the Dart, the queen of them, not excepted, there is assuredly not a Wye, and I think scarcely an Usk. And these two noble salmon rivers between them wash the red sandstone banks or silurian crags of Brecon and Radnor for something like eighty miles of their impetuous courses. In the vales, too, lie gracious park-lands and noble timber, and ancient manor-houses and hoary churches, and

the shattered relics of old border wars; while almost every hill and hollow has its story, sometimes half-told by its mellifluous Cymric name.

But it would be no use writing a book merely about Breconshire. Its name would convey nothing. Very few people outside Wales know where it is. It has never been boomed by popular novelists or poets. They know nothing about it. This is very satisfactory, and I hope it will long remain so. On the iron coast of Pembroke, again, for some fifty miles very much resembling the opposite sea-front of Cornwall, no stranger to speak of beyond Tenby, just at the near edge of it, or a few pilgrims to St. David's, is ever seen. In Cornwall, on the other hand, amply equipped for thousands of tourists, I believe it is difficult in the season to get a bed! while at least once a year somebody writes a glorified guide-book to the county. We are a queer people! A voracious novel-reader of cynical temperament calculated the other day that forty per cent. of recent novels, directly or indirectly touching country life, and written mainly, of course, by people who live within the London orbit, laid the scene, or the rural portions of it, in Devonshire or Cornwall. And furthermore, amid idyllic thatch-roofed villages, which are relatively scarce in those parts, and embellished with apple-faced maids, whereas the modern Devon peasant-girl in the south, at any rate, is conspicuously inclined to anæmia, which is not altogether surprising. Conventionality and poverty of experience contribute, I suppose, to this topographical banality. One would think a sense of humour alone would turn the tap

on somewhere else. Why not place the 'ancestral home' in Rutland for a change? A note of originality would be struck in the very first chapter, and ought to score. The jaded novel reader must be getting rather tired of Devon and Cornwall.

But beyond the more individual characteristics of Brecon and Radnor, these counties share in their border regions with Montgomery, Cardigan, and Carmarthen the wildest and most untrodden mountain wilderness that can be found south of the Scottish Highlands. This exceptional seclusion is in part, no doubt, due to the fact that the stock of grouse they carry is so insignificant as to put these moors and mountains outside the purview of the alien sportsman. As you stand upon Plinlimmon, above the infant springs of Wye and Severn, and look southward on a clear day, you can see nothing as far as the eye can reach but an interminable sea of mountain tops or high, lonely moorland: in short, the most uncompromising solitude upon an extended scale known to me anywhere within these islands. It is true that in the Western Highlands you may look upon far more expansive and more boldly uplifted wastes. But then, written large all over them, their commercial value seems to hit you in the eye. Here is the Duke of Omnium's deer forest leased to a financier of Semitic name and urban habit, or there again are notice-boards erected by Mr. Van Schuyler of New York, the tenant of a moor, notifying the traveller through the wild that he must stick to the road. Commercialism is thick in the atmosphere. You know that every acre is listed on the books of sporting

agents in Piccadilly, or their equivalents, and that the most luxurious men and women in the world are virtually in possession, and will burst in here at that particular moment which marks this item in the year's social programme they are labouring through. A discordant note, surely, and an exotic, inharmonious element when you come to think of it in a country like this! And then there is what might be termed the opposition crowd—the men and women who have not yet arrived at the shooting-box stage, and are held in some contempt by those who have—to wit, the tourists; and lastly, the sharks of innkeepers. There is nothing of this in the fastnesses of South Wales. August or January, it is all the same as regards humanity, and then one remembers with something like a start that this untrodden country is barely a six hours' railway journey from London!

It is into the eastern edge of this that the Elan lakes thrust their sinuous course. You may almost forget their man-made origin, as when fishing from their farther shore you feel there is nothing at all behind you. Nothing but wastes of moor-grass and heather, of lonely valleys and unseen waterfalls, and bleating sheep and plover, curlews, buzzards, and ravens, a few grouse, and even yet an odd pair of kites, till the fair shire of Cardigan unfolds its green, rolling map of little farms and white-washed homesteads, with its woody brooks hastening by them to meet the Irish Sea.

Every one of the four connected and irregular sheets of water penetrating these hills are as full of trout as is conceivably desirable. I have even heard one or

two say that they are too full. So when the angler has filled his basket (but that is another story) he need not worry about going home lest he should levy too heavy a toll, but go on fishing, if he feels like it, with an easy conscience and a light heart. I have never myself been in that enviable position, for the fates have so ordained that my visits have always fallen at the 'back' end of the season, when baskets are inevitably much lighter, though sometimes of reasonable weight. Nor are these imported fish, but merely the well-developed descendants of the little fellows which since time began had haunted the plashing streams of the Elan and the Claerwen and their tributary burns. Not till quite recently, in deference, I fancy, to outside clamours, have any alien stock been put in. When waters are quite full of the best kind of native stock, and the only future anxiety is concerned with the food supply, to put in more fish seems absurd. New blood, too, has its dangers. The introduction of more minnows would surely be more to the purpose if manipulate you must! The Elan lakes are not midland or south country reservoirs, but are of beautiful, limpid water, borne in with a rush by rocky streams, which here and there leap with a gay bound from some craggy, birch-tufted crag right into the lake. For a mile or so up the lower lake of Caban there is a sloping stone embankment, a trifling foreground blemish, perhaps, at the first glimpse of it, and the only one which many tourists on wheels carry away with them. But practically everywhere else the waters lap naturally against such bounds as nature set them. Here upon sloping, half-drained pastures,

rank and tufty with sedge and rushes and patches of bog and dwarf willows, there upon low bluffs of gorse and heather. Occasionally wild, tangled woods drop abruptly to rocky banks, along which you may laboriously creep if you are in the mood for hard work, with an off-chance of a ducking, and for casting upon waters scarcely ever touched. Often, too, the path of the fisherman lies upon a low, firm bank of turf and bracken. Indeed there is infinite variety, which is natural enough within such wide limits. There are many snug bays, too, and little coves formed by the outlet of burns that once ran rejoicing out of narrow glens into the two main streams. And at the head of the coves there is often a cascade tumbling into the lake between feathered crags, and stirring the water for many yards below over a shelving, gravelly bottom, and forming altogether a delightful picture. Such, no angler needs telling, are spots to stimulate his expectations, and I have often found that mine have not been stirred for nothing in these alluring corners; otherwise, though it is impossible to quite acquiesce in such a faith, the most constant habitués hold that with all the variety here displayed in so great an area, one place is just about as good as another.

This is comforting as regards the various portions of the various lakes, and I do believe that a stranger starting to fish at the first point he struck would have as good a chance, so far as the presence of trout were concerned, as a man who had frequented the lakes ever since they were formed, and knew every yard of them. They differ, of course, from natural lakes in having practically no shallow water. Two to three

yards from the shore would drown you almost anywhere. There is not the scope for sagacity and experience in the lie of fish that is afforded by bank fishing or wading a natural lake. Yet one acquires fancies for particular spots upon the Elan lakes, and is happier, perhaps, for such delusions, if delusions they be. There is assuredly some room for intuition in the varied nature of the bank, the little patches of weed, the submerged rock, the projecting bush of alder or willow scrub, the out-jutting point of bank, on the far side of which, and well out of sight, you feel sure, there is a trout lying, as there very often is. It is curious, too, how standardised in weight these trout have become. In Y-shaped Caban-Côch, the lower dam being the pedestal of the stem, they average two-thirds of a pound. In the smaller lake of Dol-y-mynach, at the extremity of the left arm, into which the Claerwen flows, they run a trifle over a pound. In the middle lake of Pen-y-gareg, beyond the right arm, which is much longer than the left, they scale as in Caban-Côch. In the top lake of Craig-Côch, a mile and a half long, into the head of which the Elan flows, the fish are a good deal smaller, and run about three to the pound.

Much larger fish are frequently caught in all these lakes, but on the whole this average is fairly uniform. They are good-fighting fish, particularly the pounders and over, in Dol-y-mynach (the meadow of the monk). On being hooked these last generally make straight for the middle of the lake at racing pace, and break many an unwary angler who fails to humour them properly at the first rush. Medium-sized, ordinary trout-flies

are used, and for the 'back-end,' besides the March brown, effective here throughout the season, and a claret and mallard, there is a wonderfully killing local fly known as the Côch-yn-las. Spinning is only allowed in certain places, and rightly so. The outflowing river runs straight down a riotous course of some three miles, from the high bottom dam, beneath which, at the mountain foot, the company have built a very pretty model village for its employés, to the Wye. The road from Rhayader, which little town sometimes gives its name to the lakes, and is, so to speak, their metropolis, runs more or less up the valley and then skirts the lakes up both forks to their headwaters. A wild, rock-plated, mountain ridge, beautifully dominating the Wye valley, drops sharply down at its remoter side into the lakes along their whole extent, and virtually cuts them off, save by mountain foot trails, from the outer world. These semi-precipitous, western slopes, ablaze in its season with great splashes of heather, nobly confront you as, with your back to the illimitable wilderness, you fish the farther shores of Caban, Pen-y-gareg, and Craig-Côch. A single road of sorts, however, crosses the northern extremity of this mountain wall. This is the old and now more than half-deserted highway to Aberystwith. A mere farmer's road, you may climb it for a laborious three miles from Rhayader up a most lovely glen with a small lake in the meadows below, and riven by the white flash of a continuously leaping torrent. At the summit you emerge on to a bleak, moorland watershed, whence in due course the stony track drops abruptly for a mile or so to the lonely

hollow where the Elan comes brawling out of the wilderness into the rocky gorge which forms the head of Craig-Côch.

From this head of the pass you may look down on the lake spreading far beneath you, wild and gloomy, in dark weather, ruffling white-ribbed in the wind against its moorish, peaty banks, while the untamed, primeval hills roll away behind it to the far horizon like a stormy sea. From this height, too, you can look straight up the narrow, level valley of the Elan cleaving its way through the billows of the hills, and for a considerable distance mark its silvery coils amid the bogs and mosses as it comes hurrying down from the back-of-beyond to its now arrested course in these tremendous waterworks. You can see also the big hump of Plinlimmon not far away, and upon the northern horizon the up-reared mass of Cader Idris piled nobly against the sky. On a fine day this is an inspiring roof-top. In a storm—well, there is no refuge. Through the August of 1912, the wettest and wildest on record, a battery of artillery were camped here, I believe they spent much of their nights and days in chasing their tents across the mountains and gave up attempting to dry their clothes quite early in the campaign. This, too, was the road over which honeymooners and others posted or coached to Aberystwith in pre-Victorian times, when Aberystwith was quite the fashion. The untravelled Essex squire may well have wondered where he was getting to, and the young lady 'of sensibility' on the look out for something to faint at must have had infinite opportunities.

Wheels are scarcely worth bringing over this rough,

perpendicular road, though the irrepressible motor occasionally, I believe, surmounts it. If you have a mind for a real solitary day amid the wilds on Craig-Côch, with the expectation of catching, if fortune be yours, rather smaller fish, and rather more of them, it is better to walk and have done with it. Save your companion anglers, if you have any, you will see no one, and hear nothing but the curlews' call and the ravens' croak, while the buzzard, of which there are great numbers in these wilds, will be generally swinging somewhere in the air above.

For this great heaped-up wilderness of South Wales, some five or six hundred square-miles in extent, is about the last refuge of the hunted of the air, and long may it remain such a sanctuary. Nature, assisted possibly by the sheep's tooth, has helped to make it so by affording small temptation to game preserving and keepering, while a local protection society, working with the scattered sheep farmers, whose homesteads at intervals dot the edge of the waste, keep an eye on the nests, and on the indefatigable egg-stealer from distant cities. As the spawning season approaches, the fish from Craig-Côch swarm up the Elan, which offers no obstacles, into the inmost heart of the hills. Not only the lakes but a good many streams and natural tarns are within or just without this great corporation estate, and can be fished either free or by ticket. The Elan is free to the natives of Rhayader, and after a flood in late August or September they come over the hills in tolerable numbers and take heavy toll with worm and fly of these migrants from the lake. This sounds rather badly. But like so many things

PEN-Y-GAREG LAKE, RHAYADER

associated with trout, it is not so bad as it sounds, the stock of fish in the lakes being so plentiful. And what are four or five thousand, which is the average recorded number taken per annum out of the whole basin?—practically nothing! And what again are the two or three hundred captured, at any rate fairly, from the Elan, out of the thousands which doubtless run up and deposit their countless young?

The pounders of Dol-y-mynach have no such easy voyage up the rugged bed of the Claerwen, or anything like such a length of spawning-grounds there. For within a mile or less they encounter a natural waterfall, a beautiful one it is too, that the most persistent trout may not surmount. The Claerwen is automatically in the corporation preserve, and that there is some evil as well as much good in close preservation, as I have always ventured to think, seems in this stream to find some confirmation. The Claerwen is nowadays very little fished, for it contains mostly fingerlings, though last summer I did see a trout of two and three-quarter pounds on its way to be stuffed, that had been killed on it above the falls with a fly, an accident of course. But as regards degeneracy in size, an old local angler, who fishes the lakes regularly, and has no cause for bias, tells me that in former days before these were made and the Claerwen was an open stream moderately poached with nets by the sheep farmers who live on it, there was excellent fishing there, and the trout ran nearly four to the pound, with the plentiful sprinkling of half-pounders that such an average indicates. Now it is full of sprats, a sign, no doubt, that there is not food enough to go round. In some

cases a plethora of fingerlings may mean a heavily poached stream, in others an under-fished one. It is as certain that the Claerwen is no longer poached as that it regularly was so till ten years ago, when the lakes were completed.

There are a few little homesteads up the Claerwen as indeed there are up the wilder Elan, before it disappears into the waste. They have their backs to the wilderness, count their sheep by the thousand, and take no count of acres. Anxious to be more handy to the pounders of Dol-y-mynach two or three years ago, I made arrangements with an old lady flock-owner, inhabiting a quaint little farmhouse above the Claerwen, to put me up for two or three days. A brace of fish, up to a pound each, was the rather scanty reward of the afternoon of my arrival, a result not tempered by the breaking away of two more good fish. A stiff rod and drawn gut are an ill-assorted combination; I would sooner dispense with the last, however, than the first and take my chance. The blend is well enough for the dry fly, with all the leisurely deliberation of both angler and fish, but when a pounder, bred in mountain water, dashes up from the depths after a blank half-hour, and startles you—well, yes—out of a day-dream, the brief contact is apt to be more than could fairly be asked of a drawn gut point. In a flash it is all over, and you sit down to vain anathemas and to that most depressing and baneful of all riverside operations, the replacing of a fly, or perhaps worse still, of half a cast, that through your own bungling or carelessness has been carried into the depths by a good fish.

But the lakes on this occasion were low and clear.

## ELAN LAKES—WILD SOUTH WALES

It was 1911, the year of the great drought, and these were the last three hours of it in that part of the country. Before dark the heavens were descending in solid sheets, and continued to plump like a water-spout upon an earth as nearly parched as these be-dewed Welsh hills can ever be. In the morning the Claerwen roared in angry flood among its half-submerged boulders, and swept rising volumes of porter-coloured water to further churn the soft bottom of Dol-y-mynach, and transform its tired summer-long clarity into an excellent imitation of pea-soup. The quite obvious thing to do on a week's fishing holiday, when the water must be stuck to as a matter of principle, would be to repair thither with a worm, in this case to some quiet backwater of the Claerwen. I wasn't out, however, for a week's holiday, but rambling at large, and I do not care for worming in thick water—it really is a degrading business—nor did I want any fish, the only possible excuse for it, as I am not very partial to trout, and it was an almost impossible place to dispatch them from to friends who are. Indeed there was only a post twice a week from the farm. The latter, though small and simple of exterior, had many points both interesting and picturesque. The long, low kitchen, for instance, had the living rock for a large portion of its floor. The small outbuildings of native stone were so massive and weather-stained, and so prolific in moss, ferns, and even ash saplings upon the walls and roofs, though neat enough within, that they almost appeared to be the work of nature rather than of bygone Welshmen. A mountain rill brought down on a trough spouted into the yard.

The old lady had a thousand sheep on the hills, which were looked after by a son and a hired man. She and her neat, nice-looking daughter worked with apparently ceaseless and cheerful energy, and when her labours were done she sat in the ingle-nook and smoked the pipe of peace. Her husband had been a man of character, and renowned for his almost truculent integrity. I have heard in Rhayader that when slightly market-peart he used to ride down the street with a halfpenny attached to the point of a stick, daring any to say he owed them even so much. The next neighbour to the westward was nine miles away across the sheep ranges!

As the next day was clear, but the waters still thick, I thought I would ascend Drygarn. Now Drygarn is the monarch of all this waste south of Plinlimmon, and is some twenty-two hundred feet high, with a large cairn on the top. I found my way there in a couple of hours, and as we breakfasted betimes on the farm I was on the mountain top by nine o'clock. But the walking on these south Welsh moors is unique in Britain, unless you know the shepherds' paths, which are not always traceable, so hopelessly intermingled is the soft going with the hard. Half these mountains are boggy enough to let in a horse, though they will carry a man, but the tussocky moor grass is always knee-high, and occasionally waist-high. The view from Drygarn, which throws up a hard, rocky crown, was glorious on that glittering summer morning. I could see the whole heaped-up, tawny wilderness from Plinlimmon to the Epynt, and beyond the Epynt and the hidden vale of Usk the sharp outlines

and shadowy masses of the Brecon Beacons leaped high into the sky. I looked westward over the wilderness, across the wild valleys down which with the eye of memory I could see the upper waters of the Yrvon and the Towy churning and boiling southward in their deep rock-bound chasms. I could see with the naked eye over the farthest edge of the solitary moors to the green lowlands of Cardigan, and beyond them in a blue haze the Irish Sea. For it was nine o'clock on a fresh, bright, summer morning. To the eastward, beyond the nearer mountains, in whose hollows the Elan lakes were winding, stretched away the valley of the Wye, easy enough, if you know it, to keep track of by its sentinel hills from Rhayader to far Aberedw, where it breaks its tempestuous way through the Epynt range towards the English border. Radnor forest, topped by Black Mixon, rolled its blue-rounded summits against the far sky-line.

Looking over the nearer waste with my glasses I soon made out, some three or four miles away, the red scaur which I had been told marked the site of the little tarn of Llyn Carw, hard to come at, rarely sought, but famous in local gossip for its handsome trout, and I took my bearings. Next morning the lakes were still too thick, and having fished the Claerwen, which was in fine order, but so full of hungry fingerlings that an accidental quarter-pounder almost upset my nerves, I started after lunch with a rod to hunt for Llyn Carw, which my host had told me was three miles away, but difficult to find. I found it both, and most of the walking, as usual in these hills, very laborious for the soft, boggy holding and the long, tussocky

grass. Llyn Carw may possibly cover two acres. Nearly half of it, however, is hopelessly shallow, with a fine gravel bottom, while the remainder resembles a big bog-hole. It was a drear, dull, and cold September afternoon. Llyn Carw, moreover, is a gloomy tarn, and a chill ripple puffed over its surface. One really needs a companion on its banks. I felt almost 'creepy' as I mounted my tackle, though it seemed superfluous to cast a fly for sulky minnow-feeding pounders under such conditions. To my great surprise, however, I saw of a sudden the head and shoulders of a large fish pop noiselessly up in a businesslike fashion towards the middle of the tarn. By wading in up to my knees, and letting out as much line as I could throw, I found I could just reach the spot. He took me at the very first offer, and ran straight across the pool, and then—well, perhaps the gut of the claret and mallard was frayed; perhaps the knot had been a carelessly tied one, and pulled. It was a hopeless-looking evening, conducive, I fear, to carelessness in preliminaries, though that was no excuse. Anyway, he broke me with a tug that a quarter-pounder could have delivered, which was grievous, as not another sign of life showed itself upon the desolate tarn, though I flogged it all hard. Such was my sole and sad experience of Llyn Carw.

Some thirty to forty fish in all are caught here in most years, roughly averaging a pound. Strangers, however, rarely make the toilsome pilgrimage. Nor, again, do they get to the much larger natural tarns, the twin lakes of Cerig-llwydion. These are four miles up hill over the rough, pathless moors from the

farther shores of Craig-Côch and the nearest road. A few local anglers camp out up there every May, and I have their records, which are good, but otherwise I fancy these two lakes are never touched. In the lower one the fish average just half a pound; in the upper so many to the pound as to be hardly worth catching. Nor is there anything in the appearance of these two contiguous lakes to suggest a reason for this extraordinary contrast. So, too, if the parenthesis will be pardoned, high up in the arms of the Rhinog mountains in Merionethshire, just above the savage pass of Ardudwy and amid some of the finest rock scenery in Wales, there are two lakes almost as near together—the one a sort of crater formation covering perhaps twenty acres and very deep, the other within sight of it, about two acres and comparatively shallow. In the larger lake there is nothing at all but fingerlings, with grotesquely big heads and scarcely even fit for the table, which rise greedily. In the smaller pool, barren and naked as its environment, any fish you may catch will be a pound or over. Practically, however, no one but a very occasional local ever wets a line on these waters, for it takes nearly two hours of stiff climbing to reach them from the head of a remote valley. I have done so once myself, and that too, quite recently. Curiosity and the weirdness of the surroundings was one motive, the other was the company of a friend learned in lichens, varieties of which, unknown, I believe, elsewhere in Britain, flourish up here, if such a verb can be used in regard to what looks to the lay eye but a dark stain upon the rock. Ravens also flourish, and their hoarse, untiring cries

of protest at the rare intruder harmonise admirably with the quite savage scene. The misshapen fingerlings came out two at a time, but the little tarn of the pounders, sheltered from almost every wind, lay glassy and hopeless. This wild domain, by the way, was the property of Cromwell's brother-in-law, the regicide Colonel Jones of Maesygarnedd, whose 'smoking quarters,' fresh from Charles II.'s vengeance, Pepys encountered as he was going home to dinner. The ancient little manor-house where he lived, 'the wildest farmhouse in Wales,' as the guide-books call it, is just below, that is to say, two hours below the lakes, and is still occupied by his descendant.

But to return to the Elan valley, not a word of tribute has yet been paid to what may fairly be called in a more modern sense its *genius loci*. No properly constituted angler, I hope, could throw his fly without a thrill over the vanished roof-tree where Shelley spent two long summers, the second of which was that of his honeymoon with the ill-fated Harriet Westbrook. To be precise, there were in this case two country houses submerged, about a mile from each other, both belonging to the owner of the romantic Nantgwillt estate, included in the Birmingham purchase—Nantgwillt itself, which stood in the fork of the Y, looking right down to where the big lower dam now is, and Cwm Elan a mile or so up its right arm. If standing to-day their respective chimney-tops would, I believe, be just under water. Though not remarkable structures in themselves the situation, surroundings, and outlook of these abodes of an old Welsh stock were exquisite. I can recall nothing of their kind, even in

Wales, more beautiful. Shelley came here after his expulsion from Oxford, and the rupture of his engagement with his cousin Harriet Grove, whose family had some land here, and the consequent row with his wholly unsympathetic father. It was from Cwm Elan in 1811 he wrote consenting to elope with Harriet Westbrook, and it was to Nantgwillt that he brought her in 1812. And, as I have said, you may to-day, uncanny though the thought of it, catch trout over the very rooms which witnessed the transient loves of the poet and his doomed wife, and all thereto pertaining which, with the tragic sequel, have exercised so many pens and fascinated thousands of readers.

Yet more, perhaps it was in these submerged walls that the boyish poet wrote the very first stanzas of that immortal treasury of song which have been preserved to us. It was his first acquaintance, at any rate, with the sublime in nature. His letters glow with the divine glories of the spot, as well they may, and end with curses on its distance from a post-office. His first solitary summer here saw him in the depths of despondency; his second, newly wedded and in the heights of bliss. As a blithe bridegroom at Nantgwillt he recalls his former melancholy at Cwm Elan as a jilted lover, a disgraced son, and an expelled undergraduate.

> A scene which wildered fancy viewed
> In the soul's coldest solitude,
> With that same scene when peaceful love
> Flings rapture's colour o'er the grove;
> When mountain, meadow, wood, and stream
> With unalloying glory gleam,

And to the spirit's ear and eye
Are unison and harmony.
The moonlight was my dearer day;
Then would I wander far away,
And lingering on the wild brook's shore
To hear its unremitting roar,
Would lose in the ideal flow
All sense of overwhelming woe.

There is a good hotel near the new Elan village below the big dam, while the Black Lion at Rhayader is an excellent and snug headquarters for fishermen, to say nothing of many good private apartments. If other holiday-makers besides fishermen knew what like was the neighbourhood of Rhayader, what abounding walks through scenes in all directions fit for the gods, its limited capacities for entertainment would of a truth avail little. Is South Wales pretty? Again what can be said for the banality of such an utterance, as if dubious whether it might be as uplifting as Sussex or Surrey, or other stock regions familiar to the Kensingtonian week-ender!

Rhayader fell into the English speech nearly a century ago, though the ancient tongue still holds a steadily waning grip upon the highlands to the west of it. Hence its lapse into English-Welsh from Rhaiadr Gwy, *the cataract of Wye*, its true name, and one obvious enough since the river takes a big leap through a gorge, beneath a single arch and bridge on the town street. This is a famous salmon leap, and more traditionally associated with poaching conflicts, I should imagine, than any other salmon-pass in Britain. The Welsh peasantry, on the face of it, are the most

determined fish-poachers in the kingdom. But their peculiar partiality for this form of law-breaking, and their persistence in it, is not mere cussedness, for the country folk at any rate are the reverse of turbulent in other things, and not much of game-poachers in an ordinary sense. But Rhayader falls is famous for its past scenes of conflict and for the ineradicable conviction of their provokers that the salmon is somehow public property. This undoubtedly reprehensible tradition is rather different from the ordinary poaching attitude elsewhere, where a few offenders, half-mercenary, half-sporting law-breakers, have the rest of the community against them.

For the Welsh traditions one must grope in the mists of the past, and you cannot expect Mr. Smith from Manchester, who has a rod, let us say, on the Dovey, to do this. He only sees the most irrepressible fish-poachers in the United Kingdom, and as such damns them up hill and down dale with all the vigour at his command. But you cannot make any native Welshman, however respectable, regard a fish-poacher as a criminal. He will deplore the practice as antagonistic to private rights and the public interest, his own sometimes included. But you might as well try and make a Kentucky man regard the survivor of a 'little difficulty' as a murderer as make a true Welshman hold a fish-poacher as a serious malefactor. He would tell you that if the law, which inherited tradition wrongly or rightly considers unjust, winks at a certain amount of salmon-poaching, the people, farmers as well as the more regular poachers, will meet the law halfway, as it were, and not take toll enough to

materially decrease the stock. If, on the other hand, a great parade of repression, or a special show of force is made, fresh watchers imported and so on, the ordinary transgressors redouble their efforts wherever they can from mere antagonism, and some who are not chronic offenders are moved to take a hand from the same motives. I am not defending such an attitude, but merely stating an ordinary truth familiar not to every one who fishes, or even who lives in Wales, but to every one who understands the country. It has nothing to do with Welsh radicalism, though the improper sympathy of Welsh radical magistrates with poachers naturally makes some people think so. It existed long before there were any radicals at all to speak of in the Principality. It is a kind of instinct that the people have certain rights in the fish, traceable probably to far-away days if not actually to the tribal period of the Welsh princes. The feudalism which was slowly grafted on this by Norman influences or gradual Norman conquest was easier in these respects than the cast-iron game laws which the Normans set up and enforced after their rapid conquest of England. Some echoes of this from old times undoubtedly account for the fact that an otherwise law-abiding people have never in their hearts accepted the law in this one particular, if they do so with their lips. For it must be remembered that the sanctity of rod fishing in mountain districts is quite a modern thing. In the abstract it is a rather interesting situation. Many things, irrelevant here, have conduced to eliminate the old, violent salmon-poaching at Rhayader. Perhaps education has lessened the zeal for a bloody

fight. For the Wye, now so valuable, is rigorously watched. In some parts of Wales trout-poaching by net, line, and even dynamite is, or was, persistent, particularly in the country of the slate quarries. But the Rhayader poacher I don't think takes risks on trout. The Elan lakes are from their nature proof against profitable poaching on the sly, and are the creations of private enterprise, not of the Almighty. Furthermore, the trout interests of all kinds are very strong in Rhayader among the local folk, who are often keen anglers, and there are several miles of free fishing on the Wye, with some salmon catches on it. But the really fine salmon-fishing for which the Wye, since the nets were restricted, is now again becoming famous, really commences a little below Rhayader, and it doesn't concern us here.

By the same token the trout-fishing, which is pretty good in places from here to the source of the river, only extends, in any sense worth mentioning, for a few miles below. This is not because the river changes in character. It would be difficult to conceive a more beautiful, buoyant, lovely looking water than the Wye from here all the way to Glasbury. Forty years ago fine baskets of trout could be killed anywhere. But whether it is the depredations of the pike, which have pushed up nearly to Rhayader, or the crowding of the chub, which are terribly prevalent a little below, no one seems to know. But in any case successful fly fishing for trout has ceased to be an item below Doldowlod or Newbridge, and I do not suppose the increased number of salmon fry in the river much helps matters. Nice baskets of three-to-the-pound

fish, however, are killed in the private waters immediately below Rhayader.

This twelve-mile stretch of the Wye from Rhayader downwards is, I think, as beautiful as any of the sections or sub-sections into which the queen of English and Welsh rivers naturally falls, and I know the river well from its source to its mouth. Just below the little town the Elan comes racing in from the west, and the big dam, three miles away, glitters brightly over a foreground of green meadows, behind which the bold and rugged masses of the Cwm Toyddur hills form an imposing background as well as a barrier to the country of the lakes behind them. The salmon have not yet lost their habit of running up the Elan to spawn in the gravelly streams of the now submerged valley, and they must be sorely disconcerted to find themselves confronted by a sheer cataract one hundred and twenty feet high! Swollen by the Elan, which is fine fishing below the lakes, the Wye now sweeps or rages downward through a long series of most inspiring sylvan scenes, its waters churned into a thousand moods by the rugged nature of their bed. Above the mantling woods, that in autumn sunshine wave such a glorious canopy upon the river's now wide and fretting surface, lofty rock-breasted hills, beautifully diversified with the rich colouring of wilder Wales—with grey cliff and emerald sward, with russet fern and birchen glade—lift their summits skyward. The park lands of Doldowlod, with their fringing woods, squeeze themselves picturesquely along the river bank, while Doleven, upon the same Radnor shore, towers above all to a height of

over a thousand feet. At Newbridge and Llysdinam the broken hills on either side fall back, but the Wye surges on with a vigour no whit abated by its recent efforts in more contracted channels, till the Ithon, from the far solitudes of Radnor forest, and big with the burden of many tributary brooks, pours in a broad volume that in flood-time fills the brown, peaty Wye with the ruddy stain of a red-sandstone country. But these after all are *par excellence* the haunts of the salmon-fisher. Here, just above, are the pools of Caerwnon, and away down beyond the railway bridge which bears the trains bound for their stiff climb up the Yrfon and over the Sugar Loaf and down the wonderful pitch beyond, into the vale of Towy and South-west Wales, are the famous salmon catches of 'Builth rocks.' The long gorge of Aberedw through the Epynt range looms near, and to see the Wye rage through it in a big flood is a memory to be treasured. And far beyond, the Black mountains will be cutting the sky-line, and thrusting back the now quieting river to the eastwards and to the pleasant pastures of Hereford. It was hereabouts at Builth that the Wye inspired the first of the many poets who have invoked it, and that was a long time ago, so long ago as the early fourteenth century, and the singer was Dafydd ap Gwylim, the greatest Welsh poet of all time, though he may not be judged by an English translation:

Sweet Wye, with thy waters as white as the snow,
Now dark as the thunder-cloud's banner of woe.
Oh why should we wander beyond thy wild stream,
From the land of the harp and the bard and his dream!

The streams of the Saxons are languid and dead,
Like the mist on the mountain when summer is fled:
With thy wild, thronging billows, now softened, now shrill,
Like the laugh of fair children that sport on the hill,
Now all glowing with light and all snowy with foam,
Like the maids of the land of my heart and my home.

Going up stream there is yet nearly twenty miles of the Wye between Rhayader and that lonely hollow beneath Plinlimmon where lurks its birthplace. From the mountain spur above, on a still day following a storm, you can hear with something more than the ear of faith the faint chords of a wonderful trio. It is the infant waters of the Wye, the Severn, and the Rheidol, plashing from their fountain springs. No wonder it set the harps of the old bards twanging and stirred George Borrow to much original eloquence. Surely, for those to whom rivers are something more than geographical expressions, there is not a spot in all these islands quite so significantly suggestive. If you have a heart that can feel, and a fancy that can be moved by such things, they will be touched here. If not, let it pass. For there is quite tolerable trouting in the Wye when it gets big enough, which is pretty soon, for the Tarenig, of equal volume and rising in the high breast of Plinlimmon, joins it three miles below. This is more than can be said, I fear, for the Severn, for though equally prolific, the little sheep town of Llanidloes holds the same fixed views on trout as the men of Rhayader have always cherished towards the salmon.

Salmon ascend the Severn in fair numbers to its head-waters. But, as for some inexplicable reason

they will nowhere rise to a fly, and are only taken in small numbers by spinning or the like, the river doesn't count in this sense. So I presume it doesn't much matter if the sheep farmers scoop out enough in autumn to smoke for their own use as a change of winter diet. It merely lies between them and the licensed net owners who do business right up to Welshpool, and, I suppose, strictly speaking, between them and the law, which without any local rod interest to back it up is, I should imagine, tolerably slack. In any case the effect of the tribute levied is, I dare say, trifling, and a good many people in the locality which breeds the fish get what they consider a table delicacy; for there is no accounting for taste!

The Llanidloes opinion on the trout question used to be very much that of the men of Rhayader towards the nobler salmon, but has vastly improved of late. A few years ago they were incorrigible trout-netters. Now the worst elements are dying out or suppressed, and an angling association of a democratic nature has been formed, with rights over thirty miles of the upper Severn and its tributaries—bright mountain streams, all of them, threading valleys that are worth exploring even without a rod. Llanidloes is pulling itself together in this respect, and laying itself out to catch a portion of the tourist stream that leaves it in the lurch and races over the Pass of Talerddig to the Dovey valley and the coast watering-places. If the summer passengers on the Cambrian knew Llanidloes and its mountain back country as well as I do, there would be a surprising boom in the building trade of that Arcadian market town, whither most of the fleeces of the Plinlimmon

range find their way. With or without a rod Llanidloes may be commended with confidence to the wanderer of taste and discretion. That glorious mountain country which stretches, but little known and but little traversed, from the Dovey to old Plinlimmon, lies at his command, threaded with bright streams and sprinkled with tarns, many of which are well worth a visit. The Severn (the Hafren) and its twin sister, the Clwedog, run simultaneously out of their mountain gorges at Llanidloes, where, united as the Severn, they sweep through the meadows in rippling, sinuous course towards Moat Lane and Newtown. Only persistent poaching in the past has prevented this portion of the Severn from providing excellent trout-fishing. The citizens have now sworn by all their gods that they will exterminate the poisonous thing in the interests of their own sport and that of their potential visitors.

But to return to the Wye, a mere step indeed from here. Having lost the Elan at Rhayader and the Marteg, which come rushing in two miles above from the northerly vales of St. Harmon and Pant-y-dwr (*the hollow of the waters*), the river shrinks to the dimensions of a handy, easily covered trout stream of a most alluring type. The narrow bosky glens, overhung by heights through which it churns in rocky troughs to Rhayader, give gradual place to a smooth, narrow vale of meadowy floor, from which the green, moorish steeps on either side rise more temperately and roll away into silence. The river, in much gentler mood, curves from edge to edge, swishing in bright, gravelly runs from one dark corner pool to another. Homesteads trail along it, each with their little grove

of oak, ash, or sycamore, their meadows in the vale, their unfenced sheep-walks in the wild above. The Aberystwith road, too, clings to the valley, even to its watershed fifteen miles away, where on a fine grade it climbs the high, wild pass of Steddfa-Curig on Plinlimmon's foot. A narrow, little-used, but well-laid and beautiful road was this to travel on but a dozen years ago. Now, however, the seaward-bound motorist has made it his own, half-ruined its surface, and turned the once quiet and rarely travelled byway up an entrancing valley into a species of uproarious race-track throughout the summer months. One may well wonder what glimmering of consciousness abides with these people of the infinite charm of this uppermost valley of the Wye that they are tearing through at twenty-five or thirty miles an hour, for the even grade tempts them. Let us forget them, however. It is not always July and August, thank heaven! And even August has not yet discovered anything south of Plinlimmon, for which we may render further thanks.

By the church of St. Curig, the patron saint of the vale at the hamlet of Llangurig, ten miles up from Rhayader, there is an excellent fishing-inn of old and good repute, the Black Lion. The Wye runs within a bow-shot of the door, and the privilege of fishing for some miles up and down is attached to it. One of those fine, old, Welsh landladies, and there are none better, catered here for a generation of anglers, and was a power not only in her own house but in the valley. She is dead now, but the hostelry is still carried on. Llangurig is a veritable little oasis in a fine, wild country, though but five miles by a good road from

Llanidloes, whose remaining poachers do not, I think, regard the Wye as within their legitimate sphere. Both to the north and south the moors spring sharply up from the vale and spread away interminably. I have more than once made brief halts for a day or so at the Black Lion when exploring the country, and have had a vow of something much more lasting registered this many a long year. Alas, the brief span of an angler's life is strewn with cruel disappointments. The vow was accomplished this very past season, but in an absolutely hopeless drought, which reduced the river to a positively lower condition than even in the unforgettable 1911. It is not here a torrential, rocky river, with deep, swirling holes, which even in a drought may tempt you to action, but a rippling, shingly stream, beautiful to fish in normal times, but when shrivelled up offering scarcely a spot where you could hopefully cast a fly. I saw plenty of fish in the water, however, and some very good ones too, and it did not need a fortnight's sojourn on its banks and many chats with local anglers to realise that it carried a good stock, and to make one long to be there in May or even a wet August. Fortunately there are attractions other than fishing in this delightful spot, which stands, moreover, a thousand feet above sea-level. An easier and more open stream to fish than this upper ten miles of the Wye I never saw. For the encouragement of youth in the noble art of fly fishing I do not know a better.

Till quite recently strange superstitions clung tenaciously to these head-waters of the Wye. It was a cul-de-sac. The Aberystwith road ceased with the collapse of coaching to be even the modest artery it

had hitherto been, and subsided into a mere local road for the thin line of scattered homesteads on its trail, east of the Steddfa pass. A dozen years ago it had still here and there a gate across it! Motors, however, have changed all that, though they have spoiled the road bed. Otherwise they have done nothing more than raise dust and wake the echoes of the hills with desecrating and excrutiatingly inharmonious sounds. After all, you can't do much towards exploiting a country in thirty-five minutes within the limits of a twenty-foot road, and that is all the motor folk have to do with this wild region.

A faith in conjurers, sorcerers, and charmers, all different professions, please to note, is not even yet quite extinct. Three or four years ago the last of a race of *Cwtserwr* (possessors of the evil eye) was held in genuine awe by some, at least, of the farmers, and his performances were seriously recounted in the vernacular by one of them to a Welsh friend and myself over the cheerful glass and a bright fire in the parlour of the Black Lion at Llangurig. Something inspiring is now required to extract such confessions from the Welsh peasant, who is a bit shame-faced about his lingering faith in the supernatural. The *Canwyll corph* (corpse candle) flickered realistically for only the last generation. The *Cyhywraeth*—a grisly female who, with uplifted bony arms and the horrors of the grave upon her person, appeared to the trembling rustic as the herald of impending woe—might be looked for at any time, and the howl of the *Cwn Annwn* (the dogs of the sky), who hunt departing souls across the midnight heavens, was still

heard by the faithful amid these hills as clearly as in the plains of Cardiganshire, that most aloof and most Welsh of all Welsh counties. Amid the hoot of the motors you may still encounter the farmers on their hardy ponies jogging in little companies to market, and often, too, a farmer's wife ambling down to Rhayader, sometimes in peasant dress, sometimes quite stylishly attired, but always basket on arm, and not a bit ashamed of it, though her husband may own two thousand sheep upon the hills above.

The ancient tongue is dying hardly but surely on the head-waters of the Wye. Rhayader and, indeed, the whole of Radnorshire lost it completely from fifty to a hundred years ago. Llangurig is just in Montgomeryshire, and all around and above it the old and the middle-aged still cling to the vernacular. But 'the children,' alas,' said an old farmer to me, 'play in Saesoneg,' and when the children begin to play in English it is the beginning of the end. But this is a corner with its back to a barren mountain and its face to an English-speaking world, and the situation is not quite typical of matters lingual. That there is no generic name for this widespreading and clearly defined mountain wilderness seems a scandalous oversight on the part of the ancients, though no doubt a mere mischance, infinitely regrettable, and a constant inconvenience both in print and converse. Like a long half-moon it completely shuts out the large seaboard county of Cardigan from the interior. The 'Cardy' simply cannot get out except at the two extremes of his long shire, and is, for that and one or two other reasons, a distinct type of Welshman all to himself.

These mountains vitally influenced racial distribution in ancient Wales. They were a leading military factor in the domestic Welsh wars and the Anglo-Welsh wars and the earlier Irish invasions for hundreds of years. Their summits, steeps, and valleys bear frequent testimony by their names to the woes, the triumphs, the anguish, and the slaughter of centuries of strife. You could drop Dartmoor and Exmoor together into their wild, uplifted waste. But they have no collective designation. The average Englishman never heard of them, and you can't explain their situation by county reference, as they cover bits of five, and these five, moreover, counties not generally well defined in the public mind. The before-mentioned scorcher to Aberystwith may sometimes be aware that he is passing over the toe of Plinlimmon, for Plinlimmon is a well identified mountain, but that is the limit of his understanding. For he doesn't in the least know whither the green and tawny steeps he is brushing with his left shoulder trend, or what they signify, and, as I said before, they have no name. In the old fighting days they acquired one of necessity, for Giraldus tells us the English called them the Moruge, and the Welsh the mountains of Elenydd, and there was a fearful lot of blood-letting within them and around their skirts. However this may be, about five hundred cars and motor cycles per diem race through this valley in the summer holidays, but I have never seen one slow down except of necessity, nor detected the faintest sign of interest in the uncommon region they are screaming through. Within sound of their profane and ceaseless discords you may

hide yourself in a mountain-land from which even the guide-book flinches.

Deep in its heart, and forming early in its course some small lakes, 'pegged,' *i.e.* staked, by a fishing club from Cardiganshire, and I think successfully preserved, rises what the delightful twelfth-century cleric and writer above quoted justly calls the 'noble river Teifi.' Breaking from the hills it streams down into the low country of Cardigan by the treasured remnants of the once great abbey of Ystrydfflur or Strata Florida, where, far removed and, one might venture to think, secure for all time from the world's throb, lies the dust of so many of the ancient princes of South Wales.

Now the Teifi is a wonderful fine trout stream, and withal no bad salmon river, running a course of fifty miles or so, by Tregaron, Lampeter, and Newcastle-Emlyn to the sea at Cardigan, and that remote, unknown, but gloriously rugged coast which was the scene of Allen Raine's Welsh novels, and the native soil of the authoress, a country lawyer's daughter. She could translate Welsh peasant life into the English tongue better, at any rate, than any one else who has ever attempted that almost impossible task, and had the distinction, I believe, of being, as regards circulation, the most popular fiction writer of her quite recent day.

What helps to make the Teifi probably the best trouting river in Wales is the great flat bog of Tregaron in the lower country, some six miles in length, along the edge of which it flows. This is the only instance of a real Irish 'red bog' in the low country of either England or Wales. It is like a bit of the bog of Allan

transported across the channel, and here also, as on the flat Irish bogs, grouse breed and are shot upon it. It plays the part of a huge sponge, in holding up the storm and flood water, so that a freshet on the Teifi, instead of running off in twenty-four hours with all its fish food as in other similar rivers nowadays, subsides gradually and keeps the fish astir and the angler active for a much longer period after the fashion common to most streams in the days before sub-soil drainage was much in vogue. This gradual subsiding of flood water must obviously economise the food supply, and conduce to a larger stock of fish. At any rate the Teifi contains a very ample one. Most of its middle and lower waters are well preserved; even in its upper and more or less open ones baskets of twelve pounds are expected and achieved in spring fishing with ordinary skill. I have had fair sport in it myself at the back end, but it is at its best in April.

Now there is a single line of railroad running north and south through Cardiganshire. It is, or rather was, entitled the *Manchester and Milford*, or the M and M, perhaps for the reason that it had not the remotest connection with either of those two industrial centres, but was mainly devoted to the conveyance back and forth by an infrequent service of farmers and squires, together with the agricultural produce that supported them both—for millionaires do not buy estates in Cardiganshire. I use the past tense, for I believe the Great Western have now acquired it. I have often travelled by this line in former days, and in the mushroom season it was commonly said that the train would always pull up if a well-sprinkled pasture field excited

the passengers to call a halt. The Teifi runs along beside it, and there is a noted salmon pool just beneath one of the small way-stations, the custodian of which in my time was an enthusiastic angler, and had the free run of it from the squire. And, I might add, that the Teifi owners all the way down were the most hospitable in this respect of any I have ever encountered. The station-master was the sole official here, and if he was in a salmon when the train arrived, which with the water in good order sometimes happened, it was awkward, or would have been if the passengers who had grown up as it were with the railroad, and indeed, as already hinted, encouraged its informalities, had regarded the matter as unusual, or done anything but turn out in a body to see the fish gaffed.

Just inside the edge of the high moors above Tregaron is a large tarn covering several acres, named Llyn Berwyn. It contains a fair stock of good trout, but of such reticent habit that they are expected to take the fly about one day only in the month. Then I believe the labour of getting there earns its due reward and more. One day late in July, a young Cardiganshire farmer of my acquaintance offered to drive me up there, as he had a brace of young pointers he wanted to handle a bit before the approaching grouse-shooting opened. The chances were consequently thirty to one against me, counting Sundays, but I took the odds unhesitatingly. So we toiled up the five miles of rough road from Tregaron, almost the only track that actually crosses these 'mountains of Elenydd' into Brecon and Radnor. Our vehicle was a dog-cart and our steed, happily for us, a faithful family friend

nearly as old as its driver. When we got on to the moors, the lake lay glistening some half mile from the road, amid the normal boggy verdure that I have said clothes all these mountains but their steeps and rockier summits with a ragged mantle, which at the best makes laborious going and at the worst is treacherous. What my friend did not know about its qualities, however, was not worth knowing. Still it had been an exceptionally dry summer, and relying upon that fact in a rash moment he made up his mind to risk it, and make for the lake instead of hitching his horse to the trap by the open road-side. It was a fatal resolve. We had not gone a hundred yards when the horse, who obviously had his doubts, suddenly broke the crust and went straight down without any warning, till there was not much more than his back and head above ground. Luckily, having I believe twenty-five years of experience behind him, he behaved like an angel. Any ordinary beast would have struggled till he went out of sight. As it was, after we had with great difficulty got the shafts of the cart, which had also mired badly, off his back, he eventually and most skilfully dragged himself out, and covered with brown bog slime looked his master reproachfully in the face. It was obviously not the right day of the month for my undertaking. There was a beautiful breeze, and Llyn Berwyn is one of the nicest lakes I ever fished in. It is shallow, with a firm, gently sloping sandy bottom. You could wade anywhere for quite a long way out and with confidence. But I only had one rise, and that from a good fish—as indeed they all are here, I understand—just after lunch, and I was so startled that if he

had fastened, I feel sure the gut would have snapped as he turned.

Close to the source of the Teifi rises another noble river, the Towy, not so good for trout or salmon as the other, but renowned lower down for its sewin. Plunging noisily through the troughs of the wild, dark brown in storm and clear amber in dry weather, burrowing continually in deep rock-walled trenches it has carved for itself in the course of ages, it foams along to meet the Doithea beneath the crags and woodlands of Ystradffyn on the verge of civilisation. Up above this in the moorland wilds it is full of small trout. Small as they are I have often made them an excuse for crossing over from Llanwrtyd wells in the valley of the Yrfon, and abandoning the social and other attractions of the old Dolcoed hotel merely to spend but a brief day among the wild sheep-walks of Nant-Stallwyn. It is a long job, being a full ten miles, and the last part of it virtually unnegotiable for any wheels but those of a hill farmer who has a nag especially entered to the business. But when you had achieved it you could kill as many small trout as you pleased. And on the way one passed Abergwessin and its picturesque inn, where the angler may stop and enjoy quite excellent trouting in the torrential head-waters of the Yrfon, amid scenes that for beauty are renowned throughout South Wales. The memories of a July day among these exquisite cascades and a basket of most sizeable fish therefrom extracted often comes back to me.

Lower down the Towy, just before it leaves the wilds, there dwelt on its banks a lady of remarkable

character. She was a spinster even then advanced in years, the daughter of a departed sheep farmer, and inheritor and mistress of all his flocks. She ruled her many shepherds with the firmest of hands, and no dealer I believe in Llandovery or any other market was ever known to get the better of her. The graces of life had no great part in her scheme of it. She had no use for frills of any sort. Warm as she was in this world's goods, she apparently wasted nothing in superfluities either within or without doors. Her demeanour suggested the Cheviots or the Lammermuirs rather than the demonstrative courtesy of the South Welsh hill-folk. She was tremendously proud, I think, in a grim, silent way of her unique reputation. Welsh was her natural tongue, as it is of every one in the heart and west of these mountains, and I don't think she had very much English. Her front yard was always seething with collies of the most truculent and menacing kind, and on my first call I felt thankful to be on the back of a horse. I have been there for tea on one occasion, a liberty I should never have ventured but with a local companion who had the honour of her acquaintance—an honour, I must say, she acknowledged with such economy of words that if I hadn't known they were old neighbours, as things count here, and on good terms, I should have opined that there was some hereditary feud smouldering. We had tea on the kitchen table while she busied herself about things unconnected with us and that most bachelor ladies with five thousand sheep would have deputed to an understudy. But perhaps it was these very qualities that made her great and even feared among

profit-seeking middlemen all down the vale of Towy.

Locked up in the chambers of the London County Council are the engineer's plans of a mighty scheme for tunnelling the mountain watershed, and carrying the waters of the Towy to mingle with those of the Yrfon, and turn the beautiful lower valley of the Wye tributary into a vast lake for the supply of London. I have seen these plans made many years ago, for a landowner nearly concerned was a friend of mine, and showed me a draft of them. There was no secret about the survey or the scheme. It still remains one of the future alternatives for London. The scenery of the Towy valley for the whole long way from the high moors to Llandovery, and the charm of the clear tempestuous river itself in its green, woody, and mountain-bordered vale, abide always in the memory of those of us who have known it. Swollen at Twm-Shon-Catti by the Doithea, it is quite a lusty river that a few miles lower down frets amid almost ceaseless avenues of verdure through the widespreading parks and pastures of Neuadd-fawr. 'Heavens! what a river,' would cry any angler who caught a glimpse of it from any point. I speak under correction as to the immediate present. But the unrestrained fish raider has made a burning example here of what even a sparse Welsh community can do when it sets its mind to it in the way of cleaning out a river that has never been protected, both of its stock of trout and its annual run of sewin.

Below Llandovery the Towy utterly changes both in habit and circumstances. All down its green historic

vale to its tidal waters above Carmarthen we have a broad stream swishing amid wide breadths of shingle, or rolling deep and sullen between meadowy banks; a well-preserved trout and sewin river all the way, picking up *en route* the winsome stream of the Cothi, till the push of the tide begins to be felt, and the salmon-netters with their coracles take sole possession of the waters.

## VII

## THE DEVONSHIRE AVON

SOME of the best rivers in Devonshire have been greatly damaged of recent years by the increase of salmon, which is a vast pity. For trout give more continuous sport to a great many more people, and if they do not furnish the fevered quarter and half hours provided by the king of fishes, there is more varied interest as well as more science in the pursuit of them. That beautiful stream the Torridge, now, I believe, an excellent salmon river, is a case in point. Its neighbour the Taw has fallen away deplorably and is hardly worth fishing, so I am told, below Eggesford. Of the Exe at least as bad things are said. One wonders whether they will make, as I venture to think, the same mistake with the Tamar, and destroy probably the best as well as the largest trouting river in the county. I have fished a great many of the Devon streams both in boyhood, youth, and middle-age, and have a nodding acquaintance with, I think, almost all of them, which, I admit, is making a rather bold claim. For scenic distinction I take my hat off to the Dart as the queen of Devon rivers, a sufficiently proud position. But do not let

Devonians of their own complacency, which in this particular is immense, run away with the notion that their streams are as beautiful as those of Wales, because they are not by a long way, though they in their turn incomparably excel in beauty those of any other English rivers south of Derbyshire. And the first of these invidious comparisons is made, at any rate, honestly and impartially, Heaven knows, for I was 'bred a fisherman,' as the Ancients have it, in the western county, and that means—well, a good many people know what it does mean, while the others wouldn't understand, and elaboration would be futile. When on rare occasions I tread the banks of a Devonshire stream to-day, with those subtle odours and accessories which belong to them alone, I can very nearly cheat myself into the belief that life lies before me, instead of mainly behind.

As a mere pious opinion, with the exception perhaps of the much preserved Tamar, and subject to the correction of any widely experienced native, I would give preference, as a trout stream pure and simple, to a river scarcely known by name outside the county. Something of its obscurity is possibly due to the very fact of its name, which, for reasons obvious to the most elementary etymologist, is shared by so many notable rivers in the three kingdoms. I have never yet met any outsider who was even aware that there was an Avon in Devonshire. But there is—and a very bewitching Avon too, the very antithesis of those placid, silent, and rather turgid haunts of pike and roach that fame has chiefly illumined. Of the rivers that flow out of Dartmoor the Tavy may boast

of her peal, the Dart of her scenic pre-eminence and her fair share of sea-going fish, but the Avon in her lower half may fairly, I think, take precedence of either for the quality of her trout; and that is what chiefly concerns us in these pages. My own angling experiences of the Dart are of such ancient date as to be worth nothing in the matter of comparison. But an old local friend who has fished both rivers almost from his cradle has showed me his fishing journals extending over many years by way of rubbing in the contrast which, in these pages, at any rate, is conspicuous. The Dart in its upper reaches has long miles of moorland waters which provide entertainment for many visitors in the way of small fish, as fish are judged even by the Devonshire standard, which is another business. But in its wider and lower reaches below Holne, in my friend's records, which have much significance, it does not come near the Avon. Nor are the Earne and the Teign, which also run south out of Dartmoor, nor yet again the Okement, which runs north, quite in the same class.

But then the Avon is very short, the portion of it, that is to say, to which these eulogies are applicable. It rises, to be sure, far within the moor behind South Brent, and in its pilgrimage out of the wild has a right tempestuous journey, deep channelled in woody gorges, and leaping betimes in high white cataracts that cannot even be seen without effort for the tangled foliage that meets above them. Running picturesquely down past the rectory and church of Brent, diving under stone bridges, and skirting the village, the little river tumbles through open meadows for a

mile, and for yet another frets again in a contracted and bosky trough. Then all at once, within the space of half a mile, it becomes to my thinking one of the best bits of water in Devonshire. On the moor the Avon is prolific of fingerlings, and practically nothing else. In the tangled hollows below the fish are a little better, but hardly worth the arduous struggles necessary to their ensnaring. In the meadows below Brent, the sportsmen of the latter being free of this much of the water, flog it pretty hard, while through the gorge below, the force of the current—at least we always thought so—was against it as a holt for fish.

It is at Avonwick, just below this, that the river comes into its own as a trouting stream, and thence it is but a dozen or so miles to the little estuary where it joins the sea beyond Loddiswell. Nearly all of its wayward, sparkling journey thither lies through as snug a valley as there is in Devon. There are many valleys in the county more beautiful, to be sure, but this one is absolutely and completely typical. Even the single track railroad which follows it to Kingsbridge has done little æsthetic damage. When I first knew the valley in my college days, and indeed for long afterwards, there was nothing of this. If bound for the Kingsbridge country you joined the coach or your friend's trap at Kingsbridge Road station, now rechristened Ugborough, after the tor at whose foot it lies.

Brent, on the main line of the Great Western, is the starting-point of the Avon valley branch line. It lies between Plymouth and Totnes, and summer refugees from both those pleasant enervating places repair to

its limited accommodation as to a hill-station for the moorland air. For among the indigenous folk of South Devon, Brent, it should be said, ranks as a highly bracing sanatorium. I would not give a fig myself for the air of southern Dartmoor. The memory of four summer months spent there in the late nineties is always, despite climatic drawbacks, a delightful one. But time has more than half obscured the awful and persistent sense of lethargy, to use a quite inadequate term, that possessed me all day long and in all weathers in that, to me, debilitating atmosphere. I had scarcely known till then what it meant to be tired in any unpleasant sense from mere physical effort, and to fish the Avon thoroughly every scrap of vitality you possess is required, particularly if the stream is fairly full. Nothing but the sternest sense of duty, or rather an absolute refusal to confess myself a weakling, supported me through the long days of labouring up that rugged river bed beneath the trees. The nights up at Brent brought no relief, and I used to get up in the morning feeling as if I had never been to bed. I got quite alarmed after a time and felt convinced that old age, like a thief in the night, had struck me prematurely, or that I was on the verge of some mysterious nervous collapse, so unnatural did all this seem to an open-air life on the slopes of Dartmoor! A necessary run up to London provided the opportunity, and I surreptitiously sought the opinion of Sir Omicron Pie on my sad case. I have often laughed over that interview, and it is worth recalling :—

'Well, I can't find anything the matter with you,' said the great man, 'but where have you been staying?'

I told him I was at Brent, and it was regarded as a bracing place. 'Brent!' he almost shouted, when I told him, 'Brent! Why, as you aren't a native, I 'm only surprised you are as well as you are. Now I will tell you something. It 's very strange that you should have come to me. For I went down with my wife last year for a month's holiday to that very place, and I give you my word, upon the third day I could hardly walk upstairs, and we left upon the fourth.' I felt much better when I came out, of course, and as the fishing was about over the protracted lassitude lost most of its significance, and dropped even out of memory shooting partridges in Suffolk that September, though it was the hottest within living memory.

History repeats itself. My mild alarms at this time recalled a rather similar experience to my father's memory. When a young fellow of his college he conceived a fancy for seeing Cornwall, but after three days, at Penzance I think, he lost the use of both his legs! Frightened out of his life he got up to London somehow, and very naturally in the character, as he supposed, of a threatened paralytic presented himself immediately at some great physician's door. The omniscient one was entirely reassuring, but told him that the curious effect was not uncommon among East Anglians and others who adventured in summer time in what is now called by railway companies the Cornish Riviera. My father died at eighty!

I have since fished the Avon in early spring when all England is, I think, pretty safe from debilitating influences. But I would not give one day of May or June, when the water is low, for three in spring when

it is usually in what is known as good condition—when the streams, that is to say, are heavy to beat up against continually, and the fish rise briskly perhaps for a couple of hours, and then go down for good, and the surface of the water becomes, as they say in Scotland, dour. Moreover, in spring the good fish, of which there are or were a great many in the Avon, half to three-quarter-pounders, have not come out into the shallows nor taken seriously to surface food, as they do later. I think the river in this particular is rather different from most Devonian streams, though exactly like so many of them in physical characteristics.

Leaving the villages of Huish, Diptford, Woodleigh, and Loddiswell to face the south-west storms on windy heights above it, the Avon cultivates a strict seclusion. For Devonian villages are not usually dreams of thatch and wattle nestling around orchards in a valley, as commonly depicted by the gushing scribe since the county became a sort of literary fashion with outsiders. They mainly affect bare hill-tops, and are exceedingly prone to slate and whitewash, just avoiding positive ugliness, to do them justice, but making no claim whatever to the æsthetic qualities with which modern convention in London and the suburbs adorns them as if it were their positive speciality. In such antiquities of all descriptions every archæologist knows the western county comes rather low on the list. 'Oh, isn't this like Devonshire?' babbled a lady and a novelist too, as we sped past Chislehurst, of all places, the other day. I felt painfully tempted to paraphrase old Bishop Philpott's dry rejoinder to the gushing lady, who asked him if

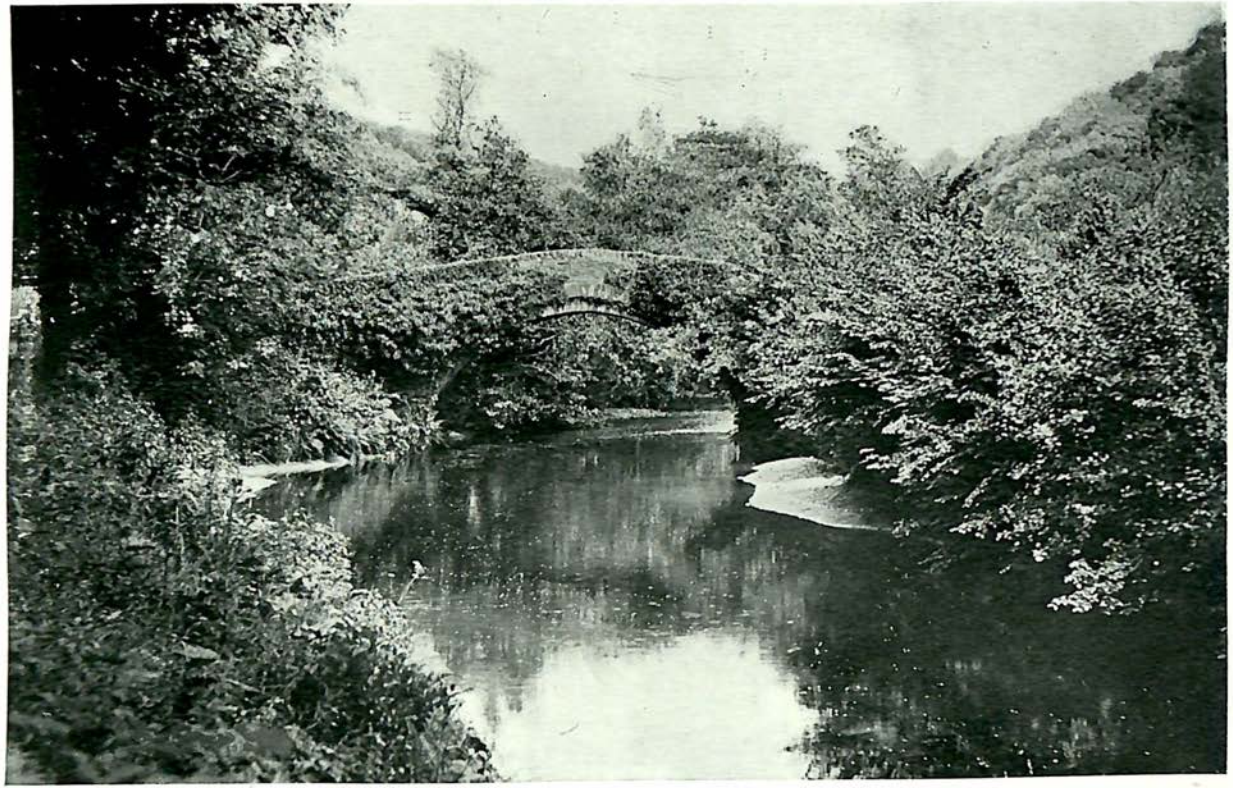
Babbacome Bay, above which they were standing, didn't remind him of Switzerland. 'Yes, ma'am, very much; only here there are no streams, and in Devonshire there are no stockbrokers,' and this in truth would have been quite inadequate to the blazing topographical idiocy of my fellow-traveller's outburst.

Urging its bright, impetuous streams through most of its seaward pilgrimage beneath a rarely interrupted canopy of foliage, this obscurest of all English Avons purls upon gravelly beds or lingers in deep rocky pools, overshadowed by fern-tufted crags and the spreading foliage of wild woods that clothe the hill-sides and hold the river in their sylvan grip. There are green meadowy strips too, plenty of them, on one bank or the other, sometimes on both. But even then thick foliage often bristles along both banks and holds the would-be bank angler at arm's length. Old stone bridges, too, festooned with trailing ivy, give here and there a more perfect finish to some vista of water that dances through flickering bands of sun and shadow beneath the swaying boughs.

All, or nearly all, this water is in the hands of an association whose moderately apprised tickets make any one free of this Avon fishery who feels equal to grappling with it, an effort well worth the while. But it is no use poking about dry-shod on the bank here if you mean business, though there are brief interludes where you might take your ease in this rather unprofitable fashion. You must get right down into the water and stay there, and push your way between and often beneath the trees, and face a current that is generally strong and rocks that are always glacial.

The Avon is no brook, nor again is it a broad river, but of precisely the right dimensions in my opinion for a first-rate trouting stream. I prefer it, as I have said, in May and through half of June, and do not mind dry weather, sunshine, and thinner water in the least. Nor, I am sure, do the Avon trout. They are then, in my experience, almost always ready to rise, and the good ones too, if you can circumvent them.

Looking down from the high bank at such periods when the voice of the stream is fluting in its highest key, and the stickles are running low, and the top waves of the pools have subsided into mere tremulous eddies, it looks, I admit, pretty hopeless. You can see the fish travelling affrighted up the gravelly runs into the deeper waters, among them that old pounder marked down of yore, followed by a score of halves, thirds, and quarters. You will not, however, be on the bank when you are fishing, but down in the water creeping warily up beside its alder fringes, and getting here and there some fine vantage-points behind an out-thrusting bush. No scurry of fish will be thus provoked, thin and clear though the stream be, if you are careful. A short line is not usually much good. This is a convention much too freely associated in print with up-stream fishing and a short rod. Well enough in high water or in early spring; but a longish line must be thrown somehow between or under the trees, and it comes easy enough with habit and practice. 'Fine and far off' is just as true of this woodland fishing as of a chalk stream, but with a great difference, for in the latter you have probably a twenty-acre



GARA BRIDGE ON THE AVON

water meadow behind you, and you must present the dry fly in becoming attitude, properly cocked, and all the rest of it.

It does not so much matter how you present the wet fly. You have got to get it there through difficulties, above and around. And you must also know where to make the effort, and when it is worth while to run risks, commensurate with your skill, of hanging up your flies. These things are outside description, nor can the 'smittle' spots upon a river's surface be chronicled, for experience alone, which becomes a second instinct, can read such lessons. Ingenuous fools have written of wet-fly fishing as an operation conducted on 'chuck-and-chance-it' principles. Possibly they refer to fishing a lake from a boat. Let us hope so! Nor is the phrase wholly amiss as applied to 'salmon-fishing' for trout down a big river. But in connection with up-stream fishing, and above all, in such a river as this is, it is a deplorable exposure of innocence. Let the man who can throw a decent fly, and has nevertheless such callow conceptions of wet-fly fishing, try his hand against some habitual exponent of it! How shifting, too, according to weather and conditions, are the sort of places where the trout are feeding. It may sometimes take an hour or so to discover that some strange whim, as it would incorrectly seem to us in our ignorance, has seized upon the whole river, and that every fish is, as it were, out of place!

The strangest case of this within my own experience occurred on the Welsh Dee; not on the rugged reaches we traversed in a former chapter, but in the

swishing, rippling streams among the meadows near Corwen, easily fished and easily waded waters, and for that reason less profitable to spend time over. It was one day late in April, and the river was in lovely condition. But I had laboured nevertheless all morning without even touching a fish, and it was about mid-afternoon when I found myself at the bottom of the long, straight half-mile of wide, shallow water below Corwen bridge, into which one would usually wade and fish across and down. I suppose I must have seen a fish move, otherwise I should most assuredly never have faced up-stream and put my fly on to such an utterly impossible-looking spot of water. For on the shallowest side of the broad shallow the water, being then a little above normal height, was rippling three or four inches deep along the foot of a grassy, briary bank that stood back a bit in ordinary times from the river's pebbly edge. At any rate, close to the grass, in water hardly deep enough to cover his back fin, I secured a goodly half-pound trout. While engaged in disposing of it, I beheld another fish bestir himself a little higher up in the same uncanny sort of place, uncanny, that is to say, for such a big river, and poke his head up close to the grassy foot of the bank. The water did not cover my brogues, but putting out a longish line, this one took greedily at the first offer, and proved the equal of the last. To shorten my story, I fished up the foot of that hedge, dry as a board in normal water, and throwing my fly as close as possible to the grass, the rippling water being nowhere more than four or five inches deep, I killed seven half-pounders, one after the other—an

achievement in successive weight that neither before nor since have I ever accomplished in the sacred Dee. And then I broke the middle joint of my rod short off, tugging too fiercely at a rambling briar in which my fly had fastened, and had nothing for it but to go home! There was another hundred or more yards of that hedge-foot yet to be fished, and I have no doubt another seven or eight fish of the same class waiting to be caught. Two or three habitual anglers, who knew every pebble in the river, came in that evening with sore hearts and empty baskets, marvelling how even Dee trout, queer as they are, could have maintained such an uncompromising sulk throughout the whole of such a perfect fishing day. But for a mere accident I, too, should of course have been numbered among the unfortunates; for no angler would ever have dreamed of considering for a moment such an impossible place for the choicer trout of a big river running down in beautiful fly order, to be lying and feeding in. For myself, I never had the opportunity of finding the water just sprawling over the gravel to the edge of that bank again. And I doubt if any one since has had the good luck to be fortuitously attracted to it as I was under the same conditions. It was cruel, however, to be thus checked in mid career; for one breaks a middle joint once, perhaps, in five years, and then probably by sitting down upon it in a moment of aberration!

To retrace our straying footsteps to the banks of the Avon, I venture to recall a humorous incident which occurred there in the long ago when I first began to know them well. Now it so happened that

an immigrant from Yorkshire, I think a retired tradesman, had bought a few acres of land and built himself a house of rather singular aspect by the river's side. A strange Yorkshireman in the sequestered heart of Devon is, I need not say, almost as much a foreigner as a Frenchman from the rustic point of view, an alien to be held at arm's length and pelted with the brickbats of rural criticism. It is equally certain, too, that the criticisms would be returned with compound interest by a scornful and canny northerner thus situated. Mutual relations were at any rate a trifle strained. So when the landowners threw their respective waters into the fishing association at its inception, the Yorkshireman stubbornly refused to do anything of the kind, and consequently, when you got to his little demesne you had to skip a couple of hundred yards of most excellent water or run the risk of facing his quite justifiable indignation. On the occasion in question a young curate from a distance, innocent of this obstacle to the otherwise unchecked career his ticket ensured him, had applied himself with ardour to the three or four excellent pools on the Yorkshireman's ground, and was fortunate enough in one of them to hook and kill a fish of over a pound weight. And not only that, but in his innocence and lightness of heart for the sockdolager in his basket, he sat down close to the owner's house, and having there consumed his lunch, lit his pipe to enjoy his triumph in a beatific state of mind we can all of us sympathise with. It was not till then that the ogre espied the audacious intruder, and hurrying to the scene asked him if he knew what he was doing. The curate, not

then in a mood perhaps to distinguish between the friendly and the hostile note in what he considered a futile question, replied that he was enjoying himself very much and had just killed a splendid fish over a pound in weight. 'You don't tell me that,' said the Yorkshireman, bridling his choler, which, I fear from frequent provocation, was not usually held in check at these encounters. 'We don't get many fish of that size here; let 's have a look at him.' So the pounder was handed over for inspection by the happy, artless curate to the guileful northerner, who at once appropriated it, and having explained the situation to the now dumbfounded angler, fired him off the premises. The stalwart and uncompromising Yorkshireman is now no more. His naturalised descendants are at peace with the world and the association, and are doubtless possessed of a beautiful Devonshire accent. The last time I fished the Avon I trod the once sacred enclosure in the full sense of moral right and legal security.

I used to fancy Woodleigh wood, or '*U*dleigh '*u*de (with the Devon u of course), as the old natives had it, as much as any stretch in this delightful river. It clothes the high hill-sides with a fine tangle of varied foliage and spreads its protecting fringes over the pools and stickles for a long mile or so above Loddiswell. But down in the river, if you do not mind timber, there is here a prolonged treat of good things as you push up the current beneath the overhanging boughs of oak and hazel, of alder and mountain ash. Barbed wire, to be sure, has added new terrors for the fisherman as it has for the fox-hunter. Once upon a time

you could drag yourself up the densely fringed steep bank of the Avon when you felt in the mood for a rest or were confronted with deep water. You could cram your rod, basket, and landing-net somehow through the thick frieze of tree roots, saplings, and briars, and achieve the upper air and a grassy resting-place. The last time, however, I battled with these rough rocks and swift currents, the swifter on that occasion for April rains, all old avenues of escape were destroyed, the natural *chevaux de frise* being everywhere entwined with barbed wire; and when all further progress up the river was barred by some deep pool, you were virtually imprisoned in a cul-de-sac. There was nothing for it but to wade wearily down again over the waters you had just fished, and clamber out into the upper air at the point from which you descended into it.

This waste of time and energy is particularly annoying in spring fishing, if the trout happen to be on the rise. For, unless the season be very forward, a great objection to spring trouting in my opinion in this class of river is that the rise, though sometimes furious and uncritical, is usually limited to an hour or two, leaving those before and afterwards a rather weary blank of futile casting upon dour waters. Every fisherman, of course, knows this, and furthermore that you can never be certain when that brief but blithesome interlude will take place, to say nothing of the possibility of its never turning up at all, though this last, of course, is all in the angler's business. It is tolerably certain that it will occur between eleven and four, and in rivers like the Avon one is constantly haunted by

the fear that the fish will come on in awkward or indifferent bits of water, sandwiched between the pet places you have already fished in vain, and those again higher up where you fain would be. It is not safe when the moment seems to have arrived either to push on or to drop back, for you might possibly find another rod in possession. Moreover, it is not easy to drag oneself from any water when fish come suddenly on the rise and face a journey through tangled woods or over untrimmed Devon fences, in waders and brogues, when you know all the time that the trout are splashing merrily at the March browns or blue duns. It is better to stick to it and receive this gift of the gods wherever it finds you on the stream. So it comes to pass that very often two anglers of equal capacity will turn out very different baskets on an April evening.

Queer things, however, happen in every month. Not very long ago, after nearly a week of battling with the rather full April streams of the Avon in most inclement weather and with very poor luck, my last day had arrived. It was far the worst to all outward seeming, even of this bad week. As I descended to the river below Loddiswell station, a biting north-easter cut raspingly down even that sheltered valley. To make the situation from an angling standpoint more supremely ridiculous, a violent thunderstorm without rain broke upon the scene while in mournful mood I was putting up my rod. Fork-lightning played in the leaden sky above the bare hill-top where the village of Loddiswell shivered in the icy blast, and repeated crashes of thunder rolled down the valley towards Kingsbridge and the sea. This, in truth, seemed a gratuitous piling up of

the agony on an unfortunate angler, with no alternative for hours but the waiting-room of a diminutive station. If the humblest inn or fireside had been accessible I should have lost a quite enjoyable day's fishing to an absolute certainty.

As it was, I descended into the icy waters where they come out into the meadows from Woodleigh wood, and at the very first cast to my amazement was into a good fish. I took three out of that pool in quick succession while the thunder was still rumbling, and the lightning playing, and the north-east wind lashing the bursting willows on the bank, and threatening snowflakes every moment. They were the better class of Avon fish, and weighed a pound between them. I went on picking up fish all the morning, for in the heart of the woods the cold wind seemed to sink to rest, and a rise of blue dun set the trout astir in flagrant violation of every rule which is supposed to guide them. But better, to my thinking, than zephyrs and April showers are those days in the thinner waters of later May and early June when fish may be picked up on and off all day, and on the whole better ones too, if harder to catch. The playing of a strong June fish, too, in these leafy avenues, amid rocks, boughs, and rapid currents, is a different business from the same encounter in an open stream. There are about twenty more things to think about, and no time to think of them, as the fish dashes and jumps from one danger spot to another, and the point of the rod has to be dipped like lightning under trailing boughs, and the line shortened as quickly by a grab at it below the bottom ring. Instructions to a young

angler how to play a fish would be mighty little good here! There is no time to reel in during these fast and furious early stages as the trout runs down towards you or darts like lightning for a submerged bush. And with a longish line out these critical moments are inevitable, while as for holding the point of your rod up, you have got to hold it at just such an angle as the all-embracing foliage for the moment admits of. A half-pound fish will give you no end of a time in such situations for about thirty seconds. After that another minute, perhaps, may see him in the net. Though if perchance you are a fixture, as often happens where the depth of an uneven slippery bottom varies from one to three or more feet, you may have had to let him run down stream a long way, and be forced to reel him on fine gut, by slow stages up a rapid current, which is a slow and ticklish business. A three-quarter-pounder, which is always possible in the Avon, will give you anywhere in its waters, and above all in these very prevalent awkward places, some really stirring moments. You should not be wholly ungrateful if you get him safely in at all, and the encounter, if successful, will possibly occupy five minutes, which will seem like a quarter of an hour. I am talking, of course, of real honest half- and three-quarter-pounders, not those lesser fry which anglers, particularly those accustomed to waters where trout run large sometimes, airily allude to as such. A half-pounder in the Kennet or the Test is by comparison a poor, immature weakling, who in his own waters, unvexed by trailing boughs and rocks, and torrents and sunken bushes, may be handled with something

like contempt. But in the western streams he is a well-developed lusty veteran, the tyrant and the bully of the few square yards of water over which he rules. As I have already intimated, in the Devonshire Avon the herring-sized fish, going about three to the pound, are far more numerous than in most Devonshire streams. This evidence of good feeding—for the look of the river hardly suggests this standard—used to be attributed, whether truly or not, to the presence of the fresh-water shrimp.

It is needless to say that the tail fly in up-stream, clear-water fishing kills two or three fish for one taken on the dropper, or droppers if a couple are used—not altogether advisable, I think. It alone reaches many of the far-away fish, and gets into brushy nooks, particularly where the water is shallow, and a slight but significant enough wave is the glad sign of a fastening fish. The trout at this season and in such places, if they come at all, nearly always mean business, and are generally of the better type. Where a screen of alder brush dips into a gravelly run, with little recesses here and there, into which, standing well below, you can curl your tail fly sideways, are perhaps the spots which on these bright early summer days upon the Avon come back to me as the most prolific of all upon the varied surface of this beautiful stream. And as tail fly upon the Avon at this season there is nothing like, certainly nothing better than, a good old-fashioned Devonshire red palmer—not a côch-y-bonddu, but a rather full red hackle with a plain body, and with for choice a few turns of gold twist round it. Four varieties of the red palmer, as used by the oldest and

best fisherman I knew upon the Avon, have occupied a pocket of my fly-book for the last twenty years, on 'in memoriam' account alone. His generation never dreamed of fishing without one. It is certainly a wonderful fly there in early summer, the fish taking it under water as freely as on the surface.

The decline in the number of fish, probably in a majority of rapid rivers, is, I think, an accepted fact, and is certainly a perennial source of discussion among anglers, and that, too, in rivers where neither poaching nor over-fishing can have had anything to do with the trouble; for in such cases there is nothing to discuss or theorise about. The Avon is a case in point. I am pretty sure there are as many fish as there were twenty years ago, and in fact there are quite enough for any reasonable person. It was, roughly speaking, in the twenty to thirty years before that period that the change was effected by some mysterious agency, here, as in other streams known to me in many parts of the west and north. In a long spring and summer —for other brief visits are not worth considering— I spent upon the Avon, I never killed more than five-and-twenty sizeable fish in a day. And I am quite certain that much larger baskets were not then made by any one, nor indeed would an occasional exception alter the case. But in the sixties thrice that number were frequently taken. There was some correspondence in the *Field* many years ago as to the baskets made here in these brave old days by local worthies, country parsons and suchlike—how they filled their creels and then their pockets, till even these last overflowed, obviously not from any mysterious super-

excellence, for many an expert, more efficiently armed and with finer tackle, has fished the river since these days. I have good reason, however, for knowing that these tales are absolutely true. The contrast between the then and now, or rather between the then and twenty years ago, must be looked for in this case as in many others to some natural cause. Nothing concerned with fishing, legal or illegal, has brought it about; that, at any rate, is pretty certain. The theory of improved drainage which carries off flood water and its store of feed in a day instead of several days seems to me the most worthy of consideration; a theory which may be applied to scores of rivers like the Avon with plausibility, for there really is no other. The Barle of my boyish Exmoor days, for instance, is another case in point. There is nothing like the stock there was then. The casual, unobservant person goes on repeating in all these cases that there are more fishermen than of old. This sounds reasonable, but it is not always true, and even were it so, amounts to nothing when the fecundity of trout and the fractional toll taken with a rod and easily estimated in protected rivers, is totted up.

A curious coincidence occurred during the last visit I paid to the Avon, and if the hero concerned catches sight of these lines, I hope he will forgive me. Now on the Welsh border there was, and possibly still is, a certain cleric who enjoyed a tremendous and justly earned reputation as an angler. Though a native, his cure of souls happened to lie in a county in which, from my knowledge of it, I should say there is not a trout but such as have been recently introduced into

reservoirs and the like. But his operations were still, and naturally enough, carried on upon his native streams. I know some of these last pretty well myself, and also many of the local fishermen who are justly accounted great men upon them, and with one voice they used to declare that there was no approaching this terrific parson in the matter of a basket. I have often heard them, both gentle and simple, discuss the problem of why and how it was that he never failed to make them all feel second-raters when he descended into their midst. But such was undoubtedly the case, and there are other magicians of this kind in various parts of England, men who for some mysterious reason stand out above the best. It was even said that some owners hesitated to give this one a day's fishing, which merely exhibited their ignorance of the natural history of trout. His patterns of flies were eagerly sought after, and named after his name. But this was no good. The users of them had half-baskets while the parson filled his. He has even been watched by envious professors to see if he has any special patent dodge, but there was obviously nothing of the kind. His execution was apparently precisely the same as that of any other good local fisherman.

But this brings me back to the gist of the story and the fact that when fishing the Avon some three or four years ago an old local friend officially connected with the river remarked, among other items of gossip, 'We have got a demon fisherman on the river now, a regular otter. He has killed bigger baskets than any one within my memory.' [This last went back fifteen or twenty years.] 'His name,' quoth I. 'Captain

——,' replied my friend. 'Good Heavens!' said I, for the name was a rare one, 'a brother of the famous parson, I 'd lay a hundred to one.' And so he proved. Here indeed was a study in heredity! I positively dreaded to meet him on the river. It was that unsatisfactory week before alluded to, which ended up so genially in the north-east wind and the thunderstorm; for abjure rivalry as you may, and as I always try to in fishing, it is never pleasant to encounter success with failure. Moreover, I met the keeper in due course, and he instantly unbosomed himself on the subject, namely that of the newcomer, the like of whom had never been seen in his time on the river. His baskets ran up in the neighbourhood of fifty fish, which was certainly an unprecedented figure in modern times, and there were plenty of experts here as on the Welsh border.

Now this is really curious and should give fishermen something to think about, though on the lay reader its significance must inevitably be lost. It is indeed a matter of scientific interest that two brothers should be thus miraculously endowed. There is no dry fly subtlety in their case, no casting of phenomenally long lines with a fly laid beautifully cocked at the end of them, no persistent studies of nymphs and imagos and cunning contrivance of imitations. In fact, I doubt if any dry-fly fishermen stand out with such singular consistency above their brother experts! It is in this case simply a question of thrashing up-stream with practically the same flies as other men who have also been at it all their lives.

These occasional superfishermen, if the phrase be per-

missible, are to be found on lakes, too, which is still more curious; for lake fishing from a boat, the least attractive to my mind under most conditions of all forms of trouting, one would think, reduced all practised fishermen who indulge in it to more or less even baskets. But I have encountered at least three lake-fishers in my life who are admitted to be supermen in this respect, and invariably bring home the largest basket in whatever company and on whatever water they may find themselves. One of them was a Welsh squire, the other an English parson, and the third a commercial gentleman. The latter represented England against Scotland in the competitions that are or used to be held on Lochleven. He was quite frank himself regarding his phenomenal gift, and admitted his inability to account for it. Lake fishing over a drift of all methods of trouting one would fancy left nothing by which the most gifted angler could consistently lift himself above his brother experts. The last-mentioned one had a theory that some kind of fourth sense had been vouchsafed him which enabled him in some mysterious way to divine and anticipate the movements of unseen fish.

The Avon isn't everybody's river—not by any means! There has been, I think, some thinning out done of late years, but I have often seen strange anglers, officers or the like from Plymouth, wandering down the woody banks below Garabridge or Avonwick, asking in despair where the river was get-at-able. These were mostly no doubt what the Devon folk used to call 'up-countrymen,' handy enough some of them perhaps on moorland, or water meadows, or on lakes, but

daunted at the first flush by the uncompromisingly sylvan character of this river, on to whose banks the little train had dumped them. A military friend of mine who used sometimes to fish for sewin with me in the bush-free waters of West Wales, and heard me speak betimes of the Devonshire Avon with that strong regard I feel for it, hailed upon this very account the call of duty which planted him at Plymouth for a season. He was one of those anglers, of whom I fancy there are a good few, who, I am convinced, enjoy the prospect of fishing and its after-memories more than its actual realities; and these mental and conversational pleasures associated with the gentle art are of course perfectly genuine. In hunting or shooting such an attitude comes instantly under the suspicion of pose. But humbug is happily impossible in trouting, and these people, I am quite convinced, honestly enjoy those anticipated excursions which will very likely never be made and the recollection of others actually achieved but clouded at the moment with disappointments now forgotten. All the æsthetic and outdoor charm of the craft appeals to their imagination, but when it comes to the actual point the glamour fades a little, or perhaps they are a bit lazy, while they are sure to be rather indifferent performers.

However, my friend went to Plymouth full of rosy anticipation of many spring and summer days upon my much esteemed river, which is only about an hour by rail from the famous west country seaport and garrison town. He did get there once, of course, but only once, and he wrote to me that he most assuredly would never repeat the experiment. He could not

understand my predilection for the river or indeed how anybody caught any fish there. The trees were too thick, the banks were too high, and the wading too rough. It must be said he was rather middle-aged in habit of body as well as in years, and a very middling fisherman. But he was one of those enthusiasts who fish a great deal in dreams, and thoroughly enjoy the prospect of days and hours that are so rarely fulfilled. And after all why should they not? I remember, too, on a certain day in early June when the fish were taking nicely, encountering a young marine sitting gloomily munching his sandwiches on the bank of the Avon at one of its open interludes. He complained bitterly of the secretive nature of the stream, and that he had been sitting all the morning by the big open pool beside him waiting to see a fish rise. As the fish were then feeding in the stickles and runs his vigil had of course been bootless. He proved, poor fellow, to be an embryo dry-fly fisherman, nurtured up in Hertfordshire or some such country, and a victim of dry-fly literature in what may be called its arrogant days. He honestly thought that 'chuck-and-chance-it' fishing, as he called it, had disappeared among sportsmen everywhere, and that waiting for a rise and throwing a dry fly over it was the only legitimate method of catching a trout. And the Avon seemed to him a deplorably awkward river for such noble endeavours, as indeed it was. Of course he was young and hadn't been properly 'bred a fisherman.' So presuming on the discrepancy of our years, which for that matter I could gladly have dispensed with, I endeavoured to get him into a more knowledgeable frame of mind,

by explaining that he was in another world from Hertfordshire, and must brush all these fallacies from his mind if he wished to be a happy angler and enjoy the four years of Plymouth, to which he told me he was destined. I felt I might venture, when we had smoked a pipe together, to offer him an illustration of how all of us, good, bad, and indifferent, fished a woody, west country stream. He came along with me on the bank above for half an hour, and though the spectacle could not have been of much practical service to him he was quite grateful, and declared that his eyes were opened to a condition of things he had never dreamed of and that he would re-commence his angling career, which I do not think had been a very full one, from another standpoint. I dare say before he was ordered off to Chatham or Portsmouth he became quite an adept, for he was very keen.

I don't know whether the Avon is more beautiful in April or in June. Its lush verdure in the latter month is delightful, and I like better to fish it then for reasons more than sufficiently stated. But in the spring, in the woods of Devon, above all along the margin of the streams, what a spangled carpet nature spreads upon the cool mossy ground, before the foliage of the trees and saplings has yet been shaken out and the eye become accustomed to the warmth and colouring of summer verdure. What a blaze is here of primrose, violet, and celandine, of campion, anemone, and marigold beneath the still bare branches of the oak and ash which play so prominent a part in Devonian woods. One misses, to be sure, the opulent sycamore, that precocious harbinger of summer, by

the streams of Wales and Cumberland. And if the larch, first of all trees to illuminate the brown woods, is in fair and welcome evidence here, one may be thankful for the comparative scarcity of the sombre pine in all its varieties. The rectangular fir plantation with its monotonous colouring and stiffness of outline, so baneful to my thinking in many northern valleys, is happily not an obtrusive feature in south-west England.

Both salmon and peal (Devonian for sea trout) run up the Avon in limited quantities, but very few of the former are taken, while the latter do not, as in the Tavy, rise freely either by day or night. Let us hope, even if such a thing be possible, no attempt will be made to spoil one of the best trout streams in the county by turning it into a second-class salmon river; for there is little doubt that a horde of young salmon fry makes demands upon the food of a river that is most detrimental to its stock of trout. The Barle, the Bray, and the torrential and beautiful Lynn seem still to retain a fair portion of their old fecundity. The Tavy, which the peal love and rise freely in, though the salmon reject it for the larger Tamar, is also a fair trouting stream despite the copper mines in its upper waters. So are the Lydd and the Lew, which flow out of Dartmoor to join the Tamar with the Plym, the Meavy, and the Walkham, all beautiful little rivers which find their several ways into Plymouth Sound.

Away from the two great moors and their skirts, the beauty of inland Devon lies almost wholly in its deep, winding valleys. Save perhaps in the south-east, the

Honiton portion of the county and a few others, look almost where you will, from any inland hill-top, you will see little but a succession of bare, humpy hills criss-crossed with rectangular lines of bank fences, and everywhere patched with square tillage fields. A distant background of moor redeems in a measure these long, rolling, chequered ridges, neither wild nor wooded, that nothing but a hardy superstition could absolve from the reproach of monotony if not of actual ugliness. Dreary outlooks are these beyond dispute, yet not dreary enough to touch the imagination with a redeeming sense of mystery. A survey of the same kind in Hereford or Monmouth, let us say for example, because the colouring there also is Devonian, is rich, broken, and beautiful. But one cannot truly say that such outlooks over the average inland Devon landscape is anything of the kind, and the many exceptions are not to the point, for the valleys are hidden, and it is down in the valleys that most of the beauty of non-moorland inland Devon assuredly lies, and of this beauty the trout fisherman most undoubtedly sees the most and the best.

## VIII

## THE ENGLISH LAKE COUNTRY

AMONG the many hardy delusions of the kind which contribute to an imperfect knowledge of their own country by a majority of Britons, is that which pictures Lakeland as always crowded with tourists. Let any one who imagines such vain things drop down upon Ullswater or Buttermere between Easter and mid-July, or to be quite safe let us say in May or June, which, by the way, are the nicest months for such an enterprise. I venture to think he would be astonished at the almost perfect solitude that then reigns over the land. I have never been in the Lake country within reasonable time in August, and never at all at Easter. But the Easter invasion is limited to a short week as regards the populace and the well-to-do business folk, while for about three more a moderate company of persons mainly concerned with higher education scatter themselves about the country. Whitsuntide is too short to count. A brief rush for three or four days, and then all again is peace—except, alas! for one blighting innovation of yesterday. For one need not be anything approaching a bigot in this particular to express the simple truth that motors have been an unmitigated curse to Lake-

land. Surely this small, compact, almost matchless region might have been held inviolate. There is not one single argument that would be urged by any sane person for their resounding, dust-raising, disturbing presence here at least, while the objections are so obvious, so many, and so overpowering as to seem scarcely worth labouring. They have been forbidden the Trossachs. There is infinitely more cause here, since the comfort of a far greater number of people is concerned. Surely the whole of the rest of Great Britain is a wide enough field for these scorchers. Why the tortuous roads of this little paradise, along which the less robust loved to walk, or drive, or cycle in sane leisurely fashion should have been turned into a pandemonium for (as indulged in here) the senseless craze of a comparative handful of well-to-do people, I cannot imagine. Fancy going through the Lake country at twenty miles an hour, and that is the minimum. It would have been so easy to draw a cordon around Lakeland, except of course against *bona fide* residents within it. Whose and what interests would have been interfered with compared to those which they have driven from the roads, and what can be said of those discordant strident shrieks which bellow through the vales to the very mountain tops from morning till night, except that we are an amazing people? I say nothing of the dust-clouds which on some roads—as, for instance, that beautiful one along Ullswater—may be seen falling in almost constant showers upon the pellucid waters. These thoughtless souls have assuredly done much to destroy many delightful features of the quiet season in the

Lake country. What they must be in August the Lord only knows! There are undoubtedly two sides to this question in ordinary districts; but that there is only one to it here seems to me the simple truth. The narrow roads have lost all their old charm, and even their very safety. The echoes of the valleys, till lately awakened by nothing but harmonious sounds, are now tortured from morning till night with hideous clamours, from which there is scarcely any respite. Beyond the range of these hooters the mountains are, to be sure, as glorious and lovely as ever. If wandering alone in May or June you chanced to break your leg, say on the Pillar mountain over Ennerdale, or on Kidsty Pike above Patterdale, or a score of other places, it might possibly be better that you had broken your neck, so uncertain would be the prospects of mortal help.

Almost no one goes to Lakeland to catch trout—so few, indeed, amid the host of tourists as to be numerically not worthy of mention. As a matter of fact, however, in the best fishing months there are few strangers of any kind actually staying in the country. I have been here myself frequently in the last fifteen years during the months of May and June, not in the main for such purpose, but nevertheless a great many enjoyable days, sometimes fairly profitable and sometimes otherwise, are among the memorabilia of these always delightful sojourns. The head of Ullswater, for other reasons as well as for those more to the purpose here, I may say at once is my favourite anchorage. There is no more delectable spot in the whole lake region than Patterdale, none better for mountain

walking, none further from railroads, none, but for the motor curse, more unspoiled. Nor are any of the other lakes to my thinking quite so satisfying as Ullswater. It is, moreover, full of trout—but of this with its reservations anon—and, unlike the other large lakes, there are no other fish but trout in its cold, limpid waters. Lastly, there is more fishing of sorts in tarns and streams within a walk of the lake-head than in the neighbourhood of any other Lakeland centre. There is yet one more reason why this long time I have always made straight for a certain hostelry on the shores of Ullswater whenever I have had two or three weeks to spare for this country. It is not merely because there is meat, drink, and comfort of the best all within a modest angler's compass, but because my landlord is a very prince among landlords, and even yet more that he embodies in his own person and character the very essence and spirit of all that entwines this country tighter and tighter round the hearts of those who frequent it; above all, for those who go there in the quiet season, those glorious days and nights of May and June. I hope I know, and, knowing, duly revere my Wordsworth. But my landlord is a better Lakelander all the same than Wordsworth, if the suggestion is not too impious. He is not, to be sure, a great poet, but he is a poet all the same, like a great many other people, without knowing it. He knows every hill, every bit of scree, every glen, every ghyll, tarn, and brook, and the name of every spot of earth that has a name between Shap and Borrowdale, and could go almost blindfold to every one of them. He knows, I think, every

*Photo, G. P. Abraham, F.R.P.S.*

THE HEAD OF ULLSWATER

mortal man, woman, and child within that twenty and odd mile breadth, and all about them. He knows more about hounds and foxes than almost any one in the country but the great Joe Bouman, his immediate neighbour and intimate, who has only just laid down the horn of the Ullswater pack after thirty strenuous years. He knows all about sheep and shepherds and collie dogs—in short, there is not a single feature of life in this wild romantic country that my landlord does not know well, and, I may confidently add, does not love. He can tell local stories in the racy Cumbrian or Westmoreland dialect almost inexhaustibly, and the unsophisticated townsman who thinks that crowds are necessary as humour-producing factors makes the biggest kind of mistake. It is remote places that breed originality and independence of character which, with a naturally racy people, make matter for the good raconteur who knows them well. And these Celto-Scandinavian Highlanders of the Lake country have always a waggish tongue and the keenest sense of the funny side of things, offering no little contrast in this particular to their Saxon neighbours of Northumbria across the Pennines.

My landlord finds time for everything. He carves at the side-tables while his many nice daughters do all the waiting. Indeed, the hotel is quite a family affair. In a holiday week, such as Whitsuntide, when the house is full with thirty odd guests, it is a great sight to see mine host on the porch dispatching the various parties for the day, one after the other, delivering the luncheon packages, bandying jokes with old habitués, and giving minute directions as to paths

and tracks to new-comers bound for distant scenes. One man is minus a stick; the landlord produces one in a moment. A lady, nay two or three, think they would like a wallet to carry their etceteras in; these are produced ready washed and clean on the spot. An absent-minded soul has left his waterproof at home; even for that a substitute is sure to be forthcoming. As mine host turns indoors, having got most of his guests safely away till tea-time, though there is always a hot lunch for the stay-at-homes, he unfolds a crumpled telegram just received and announces in a quite cheery tone that seventy knights of Pythias or eighty Oddfellows from Preston expect dinner at one o'clock. And at that hour, if you are about, you will find him in a hall built for the purpose, with his daughters in the thick of the steaming fray and in his shirt sleeves, slashing away at rounds of beef and legs of mutton, just as if he had merely to send round to the butcher's for them instead of being fifteen miles from anywhere —handing plates, giving directions, and armed with a ready retort for the most waggish knight among them. When the hotel guests collect again at afternoon tea-time, there is no sign that our landlord or his family have even seen a knight of Pythias or an Oddfellow, much less been in the very vortex of eighty uproarious and hungry ones. Everything goes like clock-work. Howsoever late at night we may keep our host up in the smoking-room telling stories of foxes, hounds, and dalesmen, I am pretty sure to see him from my bedroom window in the morning working with skill and knowledge among his flower-beds, or even cutting the lawn—dewy as it always is with the

spray from the beck that roars beside it into the lake beyond. And in quiet times, when there are only half a dozen guests in this or even in the large hotels, my landlord is ready for anything. He will row you on the lake while you woo the rather elusive trout of Ullswater, or tramp to a distant tarn and paddle you there if there is a boat on it, or take a long day's walk over Kidsty and the High Street to Mardale, lunch at the Black Bull and back to dinner, and what better could one desire than a companion to whom the whole country from the smallest wild-flower to the rudest dalesman is an open book!

I sometimes think I should like to write a tract entitled 'Advice to country hotel-keepers.' They could make so much more of themselves with so very little trouble. But perhaps the genus are born not made. My landlord was born to shine, though so far from being bred to the calling, he didn't take to it till middle age, though he had in some respects a still better preparation. But to imagine that a homily could convert the average Boniface to his like is a vain thought, for there are none like him for this kind of place—no, not one within my knowledge, and I have had a tolerable experience. The only fly in the ointment beneath his roof is the temptation to over-eat oneself.

The trout of Ullswater are something of a mystery even to their intimates. The whole lake with its winding length of nearly nine miles is full of them. Nor are there any coarse fish, but some baby perch. The trout are smaller than those of Windermere and Derwentwater, and only average about three to the

pound. Ullswater has more the qualities of a huge mountain tarn. There are few or no reeds in it, and there is no mud. It is rock-bound and rock-bottomed, and crystal-clear. And yet with all this, for some reason that no one has really fathomed, its trout are rather indifferent risers, that is to say, at civilised hours, for they are very free risers through the summer nights when, from ten on till five or so in the morning, they come close into the shores to feed. It is all open water, and no such stretch of open trouting water in all England is so little fished. That I am quite sure of. Considering its immense size you may fairly say it is scarcely touched. Yet in May, sometimes a little before that, a couple of good rods may on a good day kill thirty to forty sizeable fish. One of the few May days I ever fished it seriously was with a friend now dead, a very keen angler who frequented the lake a good deal. We had about twenty-five, and I was lucky enough to get one over a pound off the mouth of the Aira beck, a rather unusual occurrence. During one June again I paddled about a good deal by myself in and out of the bays on the upper half of the lake, and always picked up a few fish in a desultory way. Three in succession, I remember, one late afternoon weighed two pounds between them, which was the best bit of luck as regards weight in a brief time I ever had there. It is rather interesting though having a whole big lake to yourself, and this is what it practically amounts to. One learns by degrees the places where a fish may be expected, though it isn't from paucity of numbers that one's expectations and gleanings are so modest, nor can one credit an over supply of bottom

food with these caprices. There is, in short, something altogether peculiar about the lake. Some of those best qualified to speak declare that a large proportion of the Ullswater trout are solely 'night risers,' not evening and sunset risers, but through the dark hours of midnight and early dawn. This is not a high form of sport, fishing at short range entirely by feel and seeing nothing. I have known well for years the only regular fly fishers on the upper half of Ullswater. They are hard-working men as well as keen sportsmen, and can be more than counted on the fingers of one hand; for I do not reckon the few odd rustics who come down after working hours and sit with a bait at a beck mouth for an hour or two with generally small results. I have constantly seen the baskets of these two or three experts who fly fish through the night, and they often weigh from eight to ten pounds. And the Ullswater trout, though not large, are clean and handsome and strong fighters, as they should be out of such waters. The lake in the upper part is extremely deep. The trout lie mainly in the shallow shelving bays or in rocky coves where crags tufted with blaeberries and feathered with pine or birch drop sheer into deep waters. These last, with the exception of the famous promontory of Styborough, are mainly, however, on the eastern shore, from which the rugged slopes of Place Fell rise wild and steep for a couple of thousand feet. On the other, the Helvellyn side, the foot-hill pastures of Glencoin and Gowbarrow sweep along the lake shore in graceful curves, with projecting bars of silvery sand or broken rocky ledges, or mossy rims where daffodils and blue-bells in their

respective seasons blaze beneath the trunks of great forest trees. Here, drifting along from bay to bay as near as may be to the line where the visible bottom shelves into deeper water, the angler in the month of May, as I have said, taking things more seriously, will shape his course with fair prospects of success. How delightful all this is, too, when summer is just dawning with its sweet odours and balmy zephyrs, breathing in gentle ripples along the surface of the lake, while the cuckoo calls from the shore.

I do not think—not forgetting its recognised rival, the prospect from Derwentwater looking up to Borrowdale—that there is anything in Lakeland quite equal to the head of Ullswater as viewed, let us say, from off Glencoin: the fringing foliage, the far-climbing bracken steeps, the rock-breasted summit of Place Fell filling the sky upon the one side, and upon the other those gracious intervals of wood and meadowland behind which upsprings the great Helvellyn group. The consummation of the picture, however, is the mass of piled-up mountains beyond the head of the lake which fills in its background—that fine procession of peaks and broken summits which sweeps round from Fairfield to the High Street over whose lowest gap you can mark the white trail of the road that climbs the famous Kirkstone pass. How absolutely peaceful, and only yesterday, alas! how conscious of its real seclusion from a noisy world used this queen of English lakes to seem in those May and June days: the call of the cuckoo, the faint click of a horse upon the shore road, the clamour of many sheep gathered from the hills for some dipping or shearing ceremony, the chorus

of bird song from the woods, the distant roar of Aira force that

> With torrent hoarse
> Breaks from its woody glen.

Alas! what would Wordsworth say to the dreadful discords that with strident uproar shatter these gentle harmonies of spring, and make the mountains groan in prolonged agony? But enough of this. '*We have come to stay*,' '*We have come to stay*,' bellows the defiant scorcher, a sort of triumphant pæan, as if it were a positive merit to make a race-track of the shores of Ullswater and a pandemonium of its encircling mountains. But what the deuce do Wordsworth or the eloquent peace of Ullswater matter? Mighty little to any one, I should think, at twenty-five miles an hour. And all this could have been so easily averted from this tiny and precious fragment of England.

In later June it is perhaps as pleasant and more profitable to paddle in and out along the eastern shore and throw your fly within a yard or two of the steep face of the crags, where they drop sharply into deep water, or behind submerged rocks that here and there lie about their feet; for the grubs will probably be then falling from the stunted oak or rowan trees overhead that find a hard living in the clefts of the rock. Discarding the three flies of May—the Broughton point, Greenwell, and black hackle with silver twist—and with a red spinner, or a small woodcock and orange, for a drop, and some hackle-fly, palmer, or grouse for a leader, I have sometimes fished the latter by letting it strike the cliff gently near the water-line,

and thence drop quietly on to the surface. For it is surprising how close a feeding fish will sometimes hug the sheer cliff, and this mode of offering him the fly has often proved a seductive one.

There is a small lead mine a mile or so up the Glenridding beck, mercifully the only eyesore of the kind in the whole district. It is of very old standing, and employs some fifty men. These miners, however, are not as other miners—the men of Glamorgan, Lanark, and Midlothian, for instance, whose truculent and predatory raids are the terror of all decent fishermen. They are dalesmen mainly, real countrymen, often bred and born on the lake shore, pleasant and civil-spoken friendly fellows, and thorough sportsmen. A handful of them are fly fishers, though others worm the becks in high water or stand over a baited hook on the lake shore at evening after the manner previously alluded to; but both sorts are keen fishermen.

The Glenridding beck pours and has poured into the lakehead for two or three generations quite a lusty torrent of water, always of a thick milky colour from the lead hush. Deadly to the trout, one would be inclined to say? but not a bit of it! On the contrary, its mouth is a favourite feeding-place of fish, and the gravelly stretch about it that has been formed in the course of years is the favourite haunt of the stationary bait-fisher. Nor does the beck discolour the lake one atom. A hundred yards out almost every trace of taint has gone, the colouring matter no doubt sunk to the bottom. And this gravelly shore, where the beck comes in, is a fitting

spot to say a passing word on the *bustard*—not that extinct denizen of Salisbury Plain and elsewhere, which will, no doubt, at once occur to the reader, but another variety, to ignore which would be to leave the angling literature of Ullswater but half told. This same bustard is of a truth a fearsome thing. I have carried a specimen in my fly-book for years merely to exhibit to all and sundry as a contraption that fish rather hard to catch with fine tackle and well-made flies in the daylight will take readily under the moon and stars. The dimensions are those of a fair-sized salmon fly, but the make-up, I am quite sure, would frighten even a Labrador or Icelandic salmon out of its life, though ridiculously simple and primitive—to wit, a thick body of yellow worsted and a turkey wing. With this monstrosity, hurled from a long, stiff rod, the few local professors catch Ullswater trout freely in the dark hours. I ought, of course, to have fished a bustard myself, or at least to have spent a night on the lake, or rather, on its shores, for a boat is then superfluous. I am not unenterprising, but I admit with shame that I have only once succeeded in bracing myself to turn out at ten o'clock with a prospect of returning at five; and on that occasion, having been all my life, ever since my memorable fifteenth year, an unlucky fishermen as regards the sport of adverse circumstances, a quite unexpected night-frost fell upon us, which is fatal. I cannot therefore attempt an explanation of the bustard mystery. That these quarter- and half-pounders take it freely at night is, however, a simple fact. I will only say that I leave it at that. If the reader could

see a bustard, he would understand why there was nothing more to be said.

I shall never forget, however, that June midnight of my sole endeavour, moonless as it was, for the glory of its starlight effects upon the glassy lake. We were only on our way by boat to the proposed fishing-ground, a sandy bay some four miles off towards Howtown, when our hopes were dashed. But as we drifted despondently under my favourite crags of the daytime, I thought I would try under them, and as a matter of fact I did there get a brace of fish. But the reflection of those rich-coloured cliffs shed upon the water by the light of the stars alone was so brilliant, so iridescent, so realistic that the surface of the water which lay against them ceased, as such, to exist. As I cast my flies at the base of the crags, there was not the faintest indication where the glowing reality ended and its reflected vision began. I have never seen the like, doubtless because I have seldom fished on starlight nights in such romantic spots.

Some mention, too, must be made of the 'great grey trout' of Ullswater. There is some tradition of them from old monkish times, but no very big trout, so far as I know, are ever caught nowadays. Neither my expert local friends nor my landlord have ever seen one, and it is needless to say more. But oddly enough, as a mere visitor, I have had that privilege, and at very close quarters too, which may be accounted perhaps as a set off against my otherwise malignant star. And the odd thing was that I was standing at the time in a public and frequented place—in short, just where the

high road takes a brief leave of the lake and is blasted through the neck of Styborough crag. The fish was feeding and nosing about in the clear shallow water close to the shore, and being lifted well above him I was able to watch him for two or three minutes at my leisure, to see the spots on him and to assure myself that he was at least five pounds.

All I have said about Ullswater trout relates mainly to the upper half of the lake, though as a matter of fact it is applicable to the rest of it—that portion, namely, from Howtown to Pooley bridge, where the Eamont flows out. A few odd fishermen do come to Howtown in April and May, and there are two or three well-known anglers in the country about Penrith who come up for an occasional day. As a matter of fact I cannot recall ever having seen another boat out fishing with visitors in it beyond that of myself or my party. Yet here is a lake nine miles long, and beyond any doubt full of trout, that can be fished for nothing but the very moderate hire of a boat! One constantly reads and hears complaints regarding the difficulty of getting fair fishing reasonably accessible. People living in London and the non-trouting counties are continually uttering these plaints, and no doubt for the detached individual with no ties in the troutful regions and possessed of the average topographical vagueness regarding his native land, it does appear something of a problem. Moreover, 'the man who knows' is traditionally reticent on the subject for obvious reasons. I make no claim to complete immunity from that merely human weakness myself. But rather exceptional circumstances not immediately

concerned with fishing, combined with the fact of being also an angler, have given me rather unusual opportunities for spying out the land. Being one of those, moreover—not many I take it—who believe that fair fishing has practically no ill effect on a trout stream, I do not think I have been on the whole very selfish, though one often feels morally pledged to one's fishing friends who think otherwise, and still more to those who give one facilities.

Really good trouting no doubt is not easily attainable by the southerner or midlander of the type alluded to. It is to some extent a matter of purse, and perhaps even a well-furnished one does not always procure it; for the matter is further involved by the fact that, rich or poor, the great mass of what may be called immured or land-locked trout-fishers are practically limited to the holiday-seasons either by serious occupations or by the distractions of a gregarious age. And again, it is risky to send a friend anywhere at Easter, or let us say in April. Winter in the hill countries is apt to outstay its welcome, and such is the logic of many otherwise sane people that you may be secretly held responsible for the weather as well as openly for the measure of sport obtained. For myself, I am always possessed of an instinctive and genuine desire to put not merely my friends, which goes without saying, but even general acquaintances in the way, so far as I can, of trout and all pertaining to them. But, on the other hand, the risk of estranging a friend or even a valued acquaintance for life must be taken into consideration. It is not a bad idea to put your recommendation in writing, to disclaim formally any responsibility for

the weather, to discount in detail the mishaps that may arise, and then to keep a copy. Seriously though, who would dare to send any one after brown trout in August, unless perhaps to the Highlands or the west of Ireland, and knowing neither I am spared the temptation. I know plenty of places, however, short of those remoter Celtic fringes, whither I would go myself quite hopefully, uniting of course with my anticipations a prayer for rain (a brutal procedure), answered only too frequently for the poor public. But the English lakes is not, to my mind, from any point of view, an August country. Yet there is abundance of what may be called second-class fishing, easily available throughout the country, though I deplore the application of such commercially suggestive methods of appraisement. These things depend on the angler's point of view: whether for one thing he is by temperament incapable of looking for anything but the weight of a basket! I do not think there are many trout fishermen built that way, but there are a few, and upon the whole I am sorry for them. A man sees just so much as he is qualified to see and no more, a great writer has said, in discussing the diverse nature of the appeals made to diverse individuals by a countryside and all therein implied. A certain school of south country fishermen used to thunder against the bare notion of the call of the wild or any of the extraneous joys that to so many of us are simply an inseparable part and parcel of angling. We were accounted mere irresponsible wanderers and prowlers, enjoying ourselves perhaps in our strange way but not fishermen at all. A true disciple, I have seen it

argued, in effect should be without susceptibility to any of nature's accessories. He should be quite indifferent to 'atmosphere,' and assuredly have no poetry in his soul. He should have no thought, no eyes for anything beyond the exact science of the job he was out for, and the surface of the river. He should, in short, be able thoroughly to convince himself that he is as happy fishing all day between a gasometer and a paper mill as among the Cheviots or the Welsh mountains. Nay, more so, for here no possible outside distractions can disturb the dry purity of his aim. His musings must on no account stray beyond the trout he is after, or the insect life which is the medium of its ensnaring. Only the visible trout is lawful prey, and in the inevitable intervals when no rise is on his thoughts must be steadily concentrated on the mysteries of sub-imagos, Ephemeridæ, Trichoptera, Perlidæ, Sialidæ, Notonectidæ, and the rest of the paralysing glossary in which the purist seems positively to revel. Some of them are common enough things, but infinitely glorified by these tremendous names before which the ordinary angler, crushed and mystified, hides his head in self-abasement and hurries away to breathe again the freer air of the mountain and the wild. Here in time he may recover his self-esteem and get back to the plain fact that there are thousands upon thousands of lifelong trout-fishers and hundreds of the most accomplished ones to whom these things are so much Sanskrit, and doubtless always will be until trout and time shall be no more. He consoles himself also with the reflection that the little kingdom held in bondage by this portentous

glossary, and this exclusiveness of diction and method, is geographically but a tiny fragment of the angling map of Britain, its water mileage insignificant, and its subjects numerically but an unappreciable fraction of the great fraternity. One might feel perhaps rather sorry for the rank and file, mainly Londoners, of that little kingdom for the long words they must learn, or at least feel they ought to learn, and for the general air of solemnity which must cloud their graduating years; though, as a late famous angler who represented the craft on the *Times* once wrote, 'What these things have to do with plain fishing no mortal man can tell.'

It is amusing to read occasional papers on trouting in the non-sporting press by writers who are unconsciously in the bondage of the school, and the condescending and delicious *naïveté* of their allusions to wet-fly fishing and their quaint sense of the proportion of things. But how should they know? They are no doubt hard working and often clever young men—more power to them!—being for that very reason kept close to the journalistic mill and have not the dimmest notion how the angling world wags in Northumberland or Brecon, in Yorkshire or Devon. Oddly enough, the best dry-fly fisherman I ever knew—one of the best, it was always held in Wiltshire—and whose occasional inroads in quite youth upon the very driest and purest portion of the Itchen astonished its champions, knew nothing of the glossary. I ought to know, as he is a very old friend of mine, in addition to which I have frequently fished his own water with him to my very great edification. My recollection is

that his entomology was as simple and concentrated as it proved effective. And as I always took care to use the same flies as he did, this impression is no doubt a sound one.

But to return to Ullswater; if there were only the lake to fish in the rod would occupy a much less prominent place in my memories of past visits, and in my dreams of, I trust, more to come. Many good-sized becks run into the lake, invaluable as spawning-grounds for the latter, but poor in themselves in regard both to the number and size of their fish; the lovely little river Goldrill which descends from the Kirkstone pass through Brotherswater, and thence in glittering coils down the green trough of Patterdale, taking the first place in volume. Then there are the Grisedale and Aira becks, the latter the best of all in its higher waters above the famous falls. Then there are the considerable becks which, rising in the High Street, run down through the various dales of Martindale deer forest to Howtown Bay. These are greatly used as spawning-grounds by the lake trout, who run up them by thousands in the autumn. For themselves they carried and probably still carry the usual stock of eight-to-the-pounders. The best native fisherman at Howtown tells me he has not killed a trout of a pound weight in any of them in forty-five years! Nor from the nature of them and their lack of food could anything else be expected. But in the summer-time the mountain tarns are, to me at any rate, infinitely more attractive. *Cæteris paribus*, I would sooner fish a stream than a lake any day. But I would much sooner fish a lake two thousand feet

up in the mountains for half-pounders than a beck, even if there is good water, for six-or-eight-to-the-pounders at less than half the altitude. Indeed, with a congenial companion, if possible, there are few things to me more thoroughly enjoyable than a June day on a mountain tarn. But you must not take it too seriously from a merely fishing point of view, for tarns are queer things, though always interesting. Some writers have a habit of alluding to them airily and with a touch of contempt, as if they were mere places for schoolboys to fill baskets in. There may be such tarns in the Highlands of Scotland or in the west of Ireland, but except an occasional one that nature has overstocked with hungry fingerlings, such is not my experience in other parts of the country, though I do not claim a particularly wide one in this respect. All those I know, whether they are a mile or two hundred yards in length, are extraordinarily capricious, and any one who fills his basket, by fair daylight fishing at any rate, may write it down as one of his red-letter days. There is one tarn, to be sure, or rather a lake, for it is nearly three miles long, though very narrow, in this neighbourhood where you would generally, I think, under reasonable conditions, fill a basket with quarter-pounders, and that is Haweswater, an outlying preserve on the Lowther Castle property. But this is not because it is preserved, but because the fish are by nature remarkably free risers. It is notoriously overstocked, and the fish are too small, but not despicably so, and, moreover, run curiously even-sized. Even that deep-water, bottom-feeding, non-rising delicacy, the char, which

inhabits Haweswater, among other lakes, must catch something of the frolicsome temperament of its cousins; for on my only day there, when I did fill my basket, I hooked one, and was disappointed at not landing it. I remember well, as it leaped out of the water with its red and gold colouring, an instantaneous flash of memory carried me back over the long years to the trout streams of the Alleghanies. This is merely worthy of remark on account of an ancient controversy whether the American brook-trout is or is not a species of char. I had never before seen one except in that potted condition familiar to all Lakelanders, and did not know at the time that Haweswater contained any, and American trouting was assuredly miles from my thoughts at the moment. Why Haweswater should be the complete antithesis in this matter of free rising of its great neighbour Ullswater in almost the next valley, who shall say? Why, again, the fish should rise less freely in the smaller higher lakes that lie between them is another problem.

Of these last I never fail to devote two or three days to Angle tarn and Hayeswater. They are curiously different in all respects save that of a common solitude, though but a mile apart. Angle tarn lies in a shallow shelf, high up near the top of rolling fells. It is a broken, angular square, covering some twenty acres, peat coloured and not very deep. Its sides are low cliffs or boggy flats, and its trout, running nearly three to the pound, though dark coloured and a trifle soft on the table, fight like tigers. The near surroundings of the actual cup in which the lake lies do not, as here bluntly set down, sound inspiring. But

then its position is very much so, lying as it were in a shelf looking right over Patterdale and the great Helvellyn range. For, as you stand upon the farther edge of the lake, you see rising above its low, craggy shores, the intervening distance being obliterated, the shadowy peaks of Catchedicam, of Helvellyn, of Fairfield, and other heights, soaring nobly into the sky, looking not their modest three thousand feet or so, but after the manner of all our British mountains in our much abused, but for scenic purposes matchless climate, at least twice that altitude. I know no mountain tarn anywhere that provides of itself so strange a stage behind which is hung like a curtain against the sky this imposing background of mountain peaks. There is, in short, nothing to be seen beyond the brown, ruffled waters of the little lake—for if they are not ruffled the ostensible object of your day is as nought—but the summits of the Helvellyn range. The composition of the picture is rare and extraordinarily effective. This is assuredly a nook wherein to spend a happy day with its interludes of repose and activity, for it is quite certain, however propitious the weather, that the fish will encourage you to periods of contemplation, provided of course you are possessed of due discernments and are not a neophyte in the first burst of undiscerning youth. Nor are these restful periods with a congenial spirit to share them the worst part of the day.

This is not one of your grisly and gruesome tarns, though I love these others too, in wild weather, when they are at their worst—that is, at their best. Hayeswater can be all that to great perfection. But Angle

tarn is open and sunny, with all its solitude. The plaintive tweeting tit-lark and the restless sandpiper, fussy for the safety of its hidden young, are always with you. Perhaps a brood of shy ring-ousels about the rocky crown of some higher knoll with raucous note proclaim their presence, or even a stray grouse may be flushed on your first approach. The favourite mountain route from Patterdale to Mardale over the High Street passes Angle tarn, to be sure. But if you were to spend every day of a week up here, even in a holiday time, you would understand how comparatively few people nowadays care for mountain walking.

It is nearly a two-hours' walk up to Angle tarn, and the first part of it sidles up Boredale hause looking straight down upon Patterdale with Ullswater glimmering below, and the silver thread of the Goldrill twisting for miles up its narrow meadowy carpet to where Brotherswater gleams beneath the dark foot of the Kirkstone pass. What a panorama is here as you tramp up to your fishing ground, leisurely, and perhaps a little puffingly, being of necessity not long after breakfast, and halting betimes, for which in truth there is no need to make excuse. Who that has ever looked down on Patterdale, bathed in the sunshine of a fresh June morning, would demand one? Don't talk to me of the Rocky Mountains! I know them and have stayed among them, and *pace* SS. companies, emigration agents, governor-generals, special correspondents, and all the rest of it, I wouldn't give a day in Patterdale for a week at Banff. Indeed, these great Canadian mountains are at their best from the slow travelling

train, as the procession is constantly changing. They do not grow on you as a fixture at close quarters. When you have admired and had your fill of the savage rock-work above the high timber line for two or three days, you will probably have had enough. Practically everything else, hill, valley, mountain-side, is smothered in a monotonous mantle of sombre evergreen hung upon miles and miles of stiff, straight poles. To me this type of woodland, above all in so aggressive and all-pervading a form, is simply repellent.

Just look carefully, dear reader, at any of those magnificent, large scale photographs of the Rockies, which are exhibited in the windows of steamship companies and elsewhere in every city. Examine them closely and you will see what I mean. Beyond the waters to which their frame of pinewood give a singular monotony, there are only two ingredients, bare rock and evergreen foliage, unless after a fall of snow. There is not a shadow of human interest, past or present, attaching to this great waste of rock and pine, and you soon tire of it, unless, maybe, you are after game or unsophisticated trout. For this very reason the photographs of these scenes are extraordinarily realistic even to those who know them well. There is nothing subtle and comparatively little colour in the hard originals to conceal. To visitors from the prairies or Eastern Canada who have never seen any other mountains and live themselves in a new country, and do not know what you and I, dear reader, denizens of an ancient land, mean by 'atmosphere,' these scenes are of course very wonderful and satisfying no doubt in every respect. But the language of eulogy, in

which they are customarily dealt with, recognises no qualifications and none of those limitations which are so painfully obvious. If you have inspected a large photograph of Banff, for instance, or of Field, you will not be surprised at anything when you get there. It will be exactly what you expected. Every fissure in every topmost crag you see in the photograph you will see all day long in the original with equal clarity, unless it is bad weather. The miles of sombre evergreen require no effort of imagination, and there they are, unchanging, monotonous, all day long and through every month, spring, summer, autumn, and winter, when the crags above take on their coat of snow. And in the clear lakes below you see them in photographic reflection all over again, the crags, the evergreens and the straight poles, so faithfully and so intimately that guide-books, railroad pamphlets, immigration lecturers, and other crude authorities go into transports at the spectacle, and not only that but perhaps really believe there can be nothing so beautiful in the whole world.

But conceive a photograph of Patterdale giving an American, let us say, any idea of what it is really like. The ever-shifting lights upon the mountains, the radiancy of the many-tinted mantle that covers them, exposing just so much of cliff and crag as to give these value and ensure the dignity of the picture. The emerald turf, the tawny moor grass, the orange-hued bilberry, sheeny bracken, golden gorse, and in its season the purple flare of heather, with a score of other pigments, laid so delicately over a mountain-side that not a curve of its graceful folds, not a crag, nor

the white flash of a ghyll is obscured. Thank heaven that our British moors and mountains are bared to the sky and to the chasing clouds, and free to roam without a hood of leaves, or worse still, of pine branches over your head! Afforested mountains are like a beautiful statue over which a robe has been flung, obscuring or distorting every curve. How absurd it would be to say, 'But look at the lovely dark green of the garment,' or, in the case of a hard wood forest, which I grant is infinitely preferable to the other, 'mark the varied colour of the foliage for half the year.' But, after all, it is only in Britain and our moist island climate that bare mountains can be so perfect in their semi-nudity, or again can loom so grandly for their modest altitude, that survey measurements become things of nought.

Angle tarn is of a peaty quality, and the trout rather dark to match. I remember a terrible morning with them some years ago when the water in a lovely ripple was literally a-boil with rising fish, and not a fly in our books would they look at. Darkish-coloured small flies are in favour on all these tarns. It is well, too, to use drawn gut in fine weather, unless you prefer, as I do, the finer brands of the new substitute for gut. Angle tarn on a stormy day, however, can be as boisterous as any of them for its size. I well remember a whole day of severe buffeting from wind and rain, and how thankful we were to crawl into a natural cave at the west end of the lake to eat our luncheon. We were rewarded, however, for our endurance by quite a fair basket. It may also be added that there is always a chance of seeing the wild

red deer about the lake; for it lies within the bounds of Martindale forest, which stretches from Ullswater over the whole High Street range, and far in the direction of Shap. It is the only region in England, save Exmoor, carrying the indigenous red deer, though here they are shot, not hunted. They are rather shy, but one sees them quite often in crossing to Mardale, and they make a noble picture when grouped on a high mountain-top in listening attitude with heads erect against the sky-line.

Hayeswater, a mile to the south of Angle tarn, is a great contrast to the other. It fills a long deep cleft for nearly a mile between steep and lofty mountains: the great green cone of Gray crag shutting it in upon the south, the rugged screes of the High Street towering high above the upper and northern side. It is a deep, pellucid, and rather awesome sheet of water, undeniably intimidating in wild weather; otherwise, being so much enclosed, there is always a painful uncertainty about a breeze, whereas Angle tarn is generally pretty sure of one. Its trout, too, for natural reasons are of a superior quality and appearance. Quite recently its waters have been laid under tribute by Penrith. The narrow neck of the outlet, whence it pours out to rush leaping down the beautiful gorge of Hartsop beck, has been raised a few feet by a short stretch of stone embankment. This is all there is to tell the tale that the lake supplies several thousand souls fifteen miles away with its limpid waters. But then this trifling little bit of stonework, by lifting the water a few feet, has thrown the lake back over some fifty or more acres of what before was dry bog at its

head, and this has made all the difference, and is worth noting by any one interested in the natural history of trout; for it has nearly doubled the size of the fish, and that, too, in a very short time. Before the water was raised in 1909 a basket of Hayeswater trout ran less than three to the pound, thick, short, game little fish though they were. They now average consistently two to the pound, and fully maintain their high quality, an increase due undoubtedly to the large acreage of submerged land at the head. If they rose rather less capriciously, a finer lake and a more beautiful one to fish I know nowhere. I had a day upon it in 1912 with a well-known Coquet angler in early July. I had occasionally fished Hayeswater in former years, and was a bit sceptical regarding the reported increase in the size of its fish. A west wind on this occasion blew nicely up through the gateway of the cul-de-sac in which the lake lies, and on our early adjournment to the sandwiches and the flasks, with an appetite whetted by the preliminary two hours' walk, we had twelve fish between us, six a-piece, weighing six pounds, as shapely, bright, and thick fish as I ever saw, and practically all the same size, killed on a claret and mallard and a dark March brown. We enjoyed our pipes as only fishermen do in the quiet of the hills and beneath the modest smiles of fortune (for a tarn). The breeze was holding nicely, and what a basket would be ours by five o'clock. To cut short the piteous tale, neither of us had even a rise, though we worked hard for three hours. But this, of course, need not be held as a final judgment on Hayeswater. I must admit, however, that my occasional days there

in former years, when the fish were smaller, bore something of a family likeness to this one. One may wonder, too, whether, when the food supply of the newly submerged land is exhausted, the trout will decline to their original size!

My local friends, the experts before alluded to, who have fished these high lakes on and off all their lives, corroborate this capriciousness of the fish, but they have all a few great days to tell of, wonderful days, and I am sure to tell of truly. It must be so. I have never in my comparatively few ventures here been fortunate enough to catch these tarn trout in such consistent mood, and this is very tantalising when you know how numerous they are. It is quite certain that no ordinary fair fishing could ever make the faintest impression upon any of these large tarns, even if their inaccessibility did not make over-fishing out of the question; and it cannot be stated too insistently that holiday visitors to Lakeland practically never fish, nor even bring a rod with them.[1] If active, their week or fortnight in a place is fully taken up with various excursions. If otherwise, the tarns are far outside their scheme of enjoyment. Even Ullswater, though calling for no activity, is, as we have seen, scarcely ever seriously fished by visitors from a distance, and the becks, as also related, can only nourish quite undersized fish, so scant is the food supply. The fishing public of the Ullswater district is represented by

[1] To save any possible disappointments, however, it may be well to state that Lord Lonsdale, who partly as owner and partly as recent lessee holds the country east of the lake, has since 1912 absolutely closed Angle tarn, Hayeswater, Brotherswater, and the becks running into the east side of Ullswater. No permission is granted to either natives or strangers.

a small handful of local fishermen, mostly working men, but excellent sportsmen all, and such others from Kendal or Penrith as can make opportunity to get to the hills now and again for a day.

Hayeswater can be as grisly in a storm as any mountain lake I know. One morning a few years ago I walked up there by myself, with a strong rain-laden wind from the SE. When I arrived, it had increased to a gale, which striking, I presume, the back of Kidsty Pike and the High Street, reared up like an angry horse; and with renewed strength tore over the screes and down the narrow funnel between the heights, and was lashing the waters of the lake into a seething mass of white breakers. It was with great difficulty I mounted my tackle at all, and when I had achieved so much I could scarcely stand to use it. But the south shore of Hayeswater is a long succession of rounded humps clad with short grass, which fall almost sheer into the lake, and between them are little hollows with a scrap of flat shore each a few paces long. Within these, though struggling over the low bluffs from one to the other was arduous, I managed to maintain myself and get a line out somehow into the waves, slightly tempered as they were by each small promontory, and at nearly every cast I rose or hooked a fish. I think I really should have had a big basket that day if I could have stuck it out. But almost immediately more serious rain began, I won't say to fall, but to drive in solid sheets, and after about an hour I was so battered that I gave in. Rain one may endure, wind one can put up with, but when you get a rain-laden gale driving every fresh cold drop, as it were, right through

your clothes on to your skin, it begins to awaken an irresistible and unworthy yearning to turn tail to the storm and make for home and a hot bath. Moreover, what with the wind and the high waves, fine gut and a stiffish rod, I had snicked off two or three flies in fish, and only replaced them in the tumult with the utmost difficulty. So when the cast at length gave way above the top dropper, by some untoward combination of an unseen turning fish and a tumbling foam-crested billow, I could not muster sufficient resolution to lie on my face under a wet bank and mount a fresh lot on a thicker cast. I well remember the savage wildness of that scene—the low clouds racing in ceaseless battalions along the face of the high screes and crags, and the seething surface of the long, gloomy lake below. But finer than all, however, the waters were being driven up into the narrow neck at the lake foot, and there seemed to concentrate their rage, shooting high into the air in solid sheets, to be flung in clouds of spray for an astonishing distance downward into the ravine of the out-leaping beck, which in a long series of cascades descends sharply into the vale far below. I had eight or ten fish wrested from the tempest at any rate for as big a buffeting and complete a ducking as I ever endured.

On quieter days, however, it is a beautiful walk up here from Patterdale, leaving the main road near the foot of Brotherswater, and taking the turf track above the beck from the romantic little hamlet of Low Hartsop—a cluster of two or three picturesque, cheerful homesteads overhung with ash and sycamore, and three or four smaller ones long fallen to ruin : their

crumbling walls deep in moss, and their broken roofs a mass of ferns, flowers, and wild grasses. Here, too, you may see the old spinning galleries thrust out of the low, dark, upper story, where, to save candle-light, in the thrifty days of yore the women sat at their wheels spinning the wool of the Herdwick sheep, which range unfenced over the great 'stints' to Mardale. And the walk up the Hartsop beck, with fine glimpses up its tributary to Raven crag, a short hour at a leisured gait to the lake, is delightful on a fine day. There are few more winsome becks, too, than this in all Lakeland, leaping down, as it does, in sheer cataracts of no mean height, from pool to pool, fringed lightly with birch and rowan, and full of small plump trout, easy to delude, but more arduous in the getting than their size might justify for the very roughness of the brook's bosky and resounding course. One distraction which can be seen and heard nowhere else outside Lakeland may easily be encountered by the angler on Hayeswater, even as late as June. And that is three, four, or even half a dozen truant hounds of the Ullswater pack running foxes upon their own account. This famous pack is kept in kennels, and hunted regularly till about the middle of May—the late lambing season and predatory humours of the mountain foxes, when the lambs are small, giving the pack through April and May the busiest time of their season. After this the hounds are boarded out among the neighbouring farms, and it is the simplest thing in the world for them to follow their natural instinct, slip away to the hills—having privily, no doubt, made arrangements with their nearest neighbour—and

have a bit of sport upon their own account. Half the people in the dale know most of the hounds by name, and it is more than likely that the shepherd-farmer who stops to have a crack with you on the lake shore will recognise each one of these truants who are waking the echoes on the screes above. Brotherswater —that delightful gem of molten silver, which glitters beneath the westering sun in any panoramic view of Patterdale; and on airless noons and mornings almost invisible from its mirror-like reflections of the woods and mountain which overhang it—is a shallow lake of meadowy margin, but fringed with foliage upon the mountain-side, where the Goldrill streams away from its foot adown the dale. It is full of small trout, and free to the angler (though I am afraid this is now a thing of the past), save for the hire of the boat. I have not fished it myself for many years, and I should perhaps qualify my estimate of its fish, if only for a basket I saw brought in by a local friend quite recently, after a whole night with fly or bustard, which contained among a great number of smaller ones at least a dozen fish of a third to half a pound in weight.

Now every one who has been up Helvellyn from the Ullswater side, or even stood upon the summit, must know Red tarn, since it fills the crater-like hollow below the mountain's eastern precipice, and is walled in on either side by the rugged, projecting flankers of Striding and Swhirrel Edges. In short, it is a conspicuous feature of this, the grandest side by far of the mighty Helvellyn, in shape a half moon, and not quite a mile in circumference. Being sheltered on every side but the east, it is more than likely on

most summer days to be sleeping like a mirror, with the precipitous sides of the mountain intimately reflected in its crystal waters. It is two thousand three hundred and fifty-six feet above sea-level, and nearly two thousand feet above Ullswater, while the northern precipice of Helvellyn rises for almost another eight hundred feet sheer out of its waters. Nobody, save occasionally the present writer, ever wets a line on Red tarn, though all the world is welcome to. This might argue sheer perversity on my part. It is really nothing of the kind, but, on the contrary, a most reasonable and pleasant accessory to a day on Helvellyn. Nor is that quite all, for the lake, I admit, fascinates and mystifies me. Not one of the little knot of expert local anglers down in Patterdale, to whom all the other waters are as one open book, ever fish it, though one or two of them can remember having done so perhaps once in their lives.

'What 's the matter with Red tarn, Tom?'

'There 's nowt the matter wi' t'lake as I knows on,' says that hero of doughty deeds innumerable by night and day.

'There 's trout in it.'

'Oh aye, there 's trout in 't, to be sure, and some fine yins, I expect.'

'Did you ever fish it?'

'Well, now, it may look strange-like, but I don't know as I ever did.'

This is as far as I ever got regarding Red tarn with my local acquaintances.

I should like to believe that superstition has a subtle hand in this, and that the loss of poor young Gough

in the year of Trafalgar, whose remains were found by the lake-shore weeks afterwards, watched over by his still living but emaciated little dog, had cast a perennial shadow over the spot. Wordsworth's poem on the tragedy may be remembered, and even the poet, who hadn't a glimmering of the sportsman within him, noted the rising trout. Hear him :—

> There sometimes doth a leaping fish
> Send through the tarn a lonely cheer;
> The crags repeat the Raven's croak,
> In Symphony austere;
> Thither the rainbow comes—the cloud
> And mists that spread the flying shroud
> And sunbeams; and the sounding blast
> That if it could would hurry past.

Alack for that discordant terminal line, but such was Wordsworth's 'way.'

At any rate, I will allow the great poet to supply one other reason why I like a day on Red tarn. Probably the secret of its neglect lies in the suspicion that there are but few trout in it, which I think is a fact, though rather a curious one. Fed by limpid springs, and drained by the plashing beck that runs down to Glenridding: with gently shelving, pebbly, or rocky shores, and an abundance of both deep and shallow water, it looks perfection. It is, moreover, as easy and pleasant a lake to fish from the shore, when there is a sufficient breeze, as could be found in all Britain. The trout, what there are, run a steady three to the pound, and, though sometimes dark, are shapely of form and strong fighters. I say 'what there are,' because I believe the mystery, such as it is,

*Photo, G. P. Abraham, F.R.P.S.*

FROM THE HEAD OF ULLSWATER

lies in paucity of numbers. One can understand a lake holding no fish at all, like Grisedale tarn, of which a word presently, or even containing a few large ones only, or again, being full of stunted fish. But it seems strange that so perfect a sheet of limpid water should, generation after generation, support but a small supply of rather even-sized, well-conditioned three-to-the-pounders. I have seen them presumably on the rise of a still evening, and the rings are undoubtedly very scattering and wide apart. I have been always possessed of a great desire to kill a good basket on Red tarn, if only for the scepticism with which it is regarded in local fishing circles. My landlord is always hearty and hopeful as he despatches us to the other lakes; but indifference amounting almost to disapproval lurks in his eye as I turn up Glenridding beck on the Helvellyn trail. In fact I never let on now that I am going to Red tarn, but merely announce my intention of climbing Helvellyn by Striding Edge, taking a small rod with me bound on to my long climbing staff. So, without laying myself open to the rather humiliating sympathy which greets the return of the unsuccessful angler, I can stealthily, as it were, continue my experiments and my efforts to confute the champions of the Vale and their negatively contemptuous attitude towards this most beautiful little lake. Yet that is not precisely their attitude either, which makes it all the more perplexing. For each one of them qualifies his own abstention with the oracular delivery:—'Ay, there 's bonnie fish in yon lake, I expect.' But they never go there! I really do think Gough's wraith must have it in

possession, for the horrible suspicion that the faithful little dog kept life in her for so many weeks by devouring her master's flesh is inseparable from the tragedy. Seriously, though, I have once or twice thought my heart's desire was actually within my grasp. On one occasion I had seven or eight fish before lunch, the most I have ever killed in a day in this mysterious lake. And then I flogged it all the afternoon without another touch! The last time I was up there I hooked at the very first cast and basketed the handsomest fish I have had out of the lake. Eternal hope sprang once more in my breast, especially as two or three years had passed since the last experiment. And then came a long blank, when I handed my rod to a companion, climbed up to the top of Helvellyn by Striding Edge, was rewarded by a glorious view, and so down by Swhirrel Edge on the other side of the lake. My friend had got one more in the hour I was absent. After that we tried alternately, but in vain, though every condition was propitious; and the tarn along every foot of its shore does lend itself so perfectly to effective and comfortable treatment with a fly-rod. But after all, the two hours' walk from Ullswater along the high ridge leading to Helvellyn, with that glorious ever-present prospect of Grisedale below you, if only to lunch at Red tarn, beneath the mighty precipice of Helvellyn, would be accounted of itself a day well spent by many to whom trouting is a vain thing. And so it is, and if despairing of trout, and seizing the propitious moment when the peak is free of cloud, you can add its modest conquest and its noble outlook to your little day, the fish may be

accounted but an incident in the outing. It is a lonely, imposing, and inspiring spot. In June you may pass a whole day here without seeing a soul, though two of the regular routes up the mountain pass within sight of it. Looking up at Striding Edge from Red tarn, particularly if it is opening and shutting its dark, rugged outline in a driving mist, it seems really perilous and intimidating, though every one knows there is nothing in it to any reasonably active wight with a steady head. Indeed, Swhirrel Edge is much harder work, and nearly as easy to tip over from.

Now every one who has ascended or descended Helvellyn on the Grasmere side knows Grisedale tarn, for the path leads along its shores. It is nearly round, and more than a mile in circumference. That trout of some sort inhabited it any knowledgeable angler would assume as a matter of course. It looks made for them, and the Grisedale beck, which contains the usual share of small ones plunges out of it down the beautiful glen whose name it bears. But there really are no fish here. The dalesmen say so emphatically, though such a matter is perhaps difficult to prove positively. I selected not long ago a perfect day for the experiment, and fished it steadily with a lovely breeze for two or three hours without a sign of one. I have heard some talk of trout here in former days, but why not now? There are no bad practices carried on in this country. Besides, if there were, they could not empty a deep mountain lake over a mile round, with a trouting beck running out of it. These things are very mysterious. It would be interesting to know something more of them. Grisedale has apparently

much better feeding than Red tarn, for numbers of small 'sikes' from wide-stretching, boggy slopes run into it; while Red tarn is wholly fed by springs or short, tiny rills from precipitous cliffs, so there may well be an insufficient lack of bottom feed to support many trout. But why are there none in the other? Can it be an utter lack of spawning ground, and why is Angle tarn, physically a duplicate of this larger one, as full of trout as it can hold! Nor must I by any means forget to mention that in Red tarn there are some of those strange fish like a fresh-water herring, precisely the same species, I think, as are found in Bala, and known as *Gwyniad* in Wales and *Skellies* in the Lake country. They are rarely seen and never caught on a line, though sometimes in the nets, but being very tender are frequently killed by the dashing of the waves upon a rocky shore and thrown up dead. I have seen them at Bala, and they have been picked up at Red tarn. There used to be plenty of them in Ullswater and other lakes, but I think they are now extinct. There were once quantities of char in Ullswater; now there is not one. As they mainly haunt deep waters and rise but little to the fly, the angler as such has no particular reason to regret their disappearance. This is said to be due to the lead pollution of the Glenridding beck, not from any effect which the latter had upon that corner of the lake, which, as already mentioned, does not affect the trout, but because the said beck was the old spawning-ground of the char. Trout, when deprived of one spawning-ground seek another, but it seems that char lack this initiative, or instinct.

Since writing the first portion of this chapter,

the unexpected has happened in the shape of another fortnight on Ullswater—not undertaken mainly in the interests of trout, but for the latter portion of the mountain fox-hunting season. As a rule, however, the two work in beautifully together. But unfortunately for the well-laid scheme, this last April was so late and so cold, and the snow still lay so deep in the high mountain hollows, that the lake trout had barely got going. Nor had my local friends, who, with all May before them, could regard the situation with complacency; we, unfortunately, could not. At our first attempt we got three, at our second nine, at our third eleven! Things were beginning to improve, and as with the opening of May we steamed sorrowfully down the lake to meet the coach at Pooley bridge, I need not say it was the first good-looking day of the season, a lovely ripple and a balmy air. There was only one boat out, and that off Howtown. It was C——; I waved him a farewell salute full of envy. I heard incidentally he got twenty that day, and I feel quite sure from what I know of his fancy that he killed them on a black-hackle and a Broughton-point.

Most of us, I am inclined to suspect, who have a fancy for mountain tarns are almost as much fascinated by the eeriness of their portentous gloom in wild weather as by the attractions of their gentler moods. For myself, I do not think there is anything in all nature within these islands so impressive as the former, more especially if one is absolutely alone. And, after all, it is only a few of us anglers that are ever in a position to cultivate a protracted intimacy with these innermost haunts of the spirit of solitude. I well

remember the effect of one of these creepy experiences on a little Welsh boy, and how it operated to my undoing. Now there is a grim little tarn in a lonely spot beneath the precipice of one of the Arrans in the neighbourhood of Bala lake. It is a four-mile walk there over the hills, but worth the effort, not merely for its striking situation but for the excellent trout, running about three to the pound, which sometimes rise well to the fly. On the occasion of this particular visit to it, having been slightly injured by an accident, I made interest with the village schoolmaster to supply me (*ultra vires*, of course) with an urchin, as bearer of my waders, brogues, basket, etc. And incidentally I had always to make a considerable detour that summer for a black bull who, as the old Latin saying goes, had 'hay on his horns' and made the mountains echo with his minatory roars. My urchin had, of course, no English, and what was passing in his mind I could only surmise. His spirits were evidently maintained throughout the morning by my fairly frequent calls for the landing-net. But later on the clouds came down upon the tarn, racing low in filmy shrouds against the black precipices and blotting out the world. The fish ceased to rise, but persevering in hopes of better times I presently forgot all about the boy, having no use for the net. When eventually I looked around for him the wretched '*bachen*' was nowhere to be seen, and I hunted the shores of that now gloomy tarn filled with the most horrible forebodings. The landing-net was there sure enough lying on the bank. Could the brat be at the bottom of the lake, for I hadn't seen him for an hour? There

was nothing for it but to make for home, bearing the burden that should have been his, though that inconvenience was as nought compared to the load I carried on my mind. I didn't even bother about the bull, in the mist, a piece of foolhardiness—as knowing Welsh bulls—I should be utterly incapable of in calmer moments. To shorten my tale the miserable brat turned out to be at home safe and sound, and the reaction from anxiety to wrath on my part was great. We had it out, with the schoolmaster as interpreter, the mother and the boy having no English. It transpired that the urchin had become terrified at the lonely and gruesome aspect of the place, and left so long to his own reflection had incontinently fled. The schoolmaster begged me not to give him his shilling, but I thought in this particular I perhaps understood the situation better than the pedagogue, who provided me on the next occasion with a stouter-hearted ghillie, proof against hobgoblins and supernatural influences. After all, this was the very spot, according to the poet, where Timon inspired the youthful Arthur, a very haunt of magic memories; so who knows but that this little Goidel, this insignificant representative of a primitive speech and a primitive race may have seen and heard things not revealed to a Saesenog.

There is very fair fishing for heavy trout in Windermere, Derwentwater, and Bassenthwaite, and a good rise of mayfly, called here the 'drake' on all three. With Windermere fishing I have no personal acquaintance, but I see, as I write this, that a well-known Manchester angler killed over a hundred trout there last year of from one to four pounds a-piece with fly.

On Derwentwater there are, or were, a considerable number of local fishermen, obviously men of leisure. For every morning, from early May till the drake season, you might see half a dozen boats come rowing down from Keswick to the upper reaches of the lake between the old lead mines and Lodore. Here they would fish and re-fish over the drifts as the wind ordained. At either end of every boat was planted an angler always standing up and waving a fifteen-foot rod as if it were twenty pound salmon and not pound trout that he was after. Why they did not sit down comfortably with a ten-foot rod I never could imagine; for the extra distance they might cast (and trout don't mind a boat very much) was at least neutralised by the extra display of their persons to the fish. Why these enormous rods, this violent exertion, this tiresome balancing on heel and toe in an often rocking boat I cannot think. But the fishermen of Derwentwater maintained that you could not catch their trout any other way. I did, however, and so of course would anybody. At least I caught my share in the two or three days of the mayfly season in which I occupied one of a dozen or fifteen boats on the lake. For when the drake comes up, anglers come out in much greater force, and when the drake goes down, the trout, I believe, remain at the bottom for the rest of the season. But this was over a dozen years ago, and the perpendicular attitude and salmon-rod superstition may have given way. May-fly seasons vary of course immensely. When I was there it was a bad one, and we didn't average more than two brace a day to a rod. A pound is the unit weight on Derwentwater, but fish

often run much larger, and very good baskets are occasionally made, and many blanks, it may also be added, are endured. I am not passionately attached to boat fishing, but if accessories can glorify it, it is surely here on these matchless lakes. It is a pretty sight, too, that of the mayflies pursuing their brief dance at all heights over Derwentwater with the sea-gulls darting at them in mid-air. The fly hatches considerably later on Bassenthwaite, so that the Keswick angler has something like two seasons, and the trout there are about the same size. I have fished Buttermere, too, and Crummock, only divided, it may be remembered, from one another by a few meadows. Lovely as they are to sojourn by, they furnish nowadays for some reason very indifferent trout-fishing, and the fish run comparatively small, Buttermere, which is, or was, neither fished, netted, nor poached, being the worst of all! As in Windermere and Derwentwater, so in these two smaller lakes the char is indigenous. As they haunt the deep waters, they are fished for very deep with special trolling tackle, in June, more, I imagine, for the sake of the pot than the sport. Potted char is as well known a local production of Keswick as is the potted lamprey of Worcester. I believe, however, Ennerdale is quite a good fishing lake for the smaller variety of trout. There is, moreover, a small but comfortable inn upon its banks with boats attached. The lords of the manor have netting rights on nearly all these waters. The nets are used a little, but so far from the privilege being abused, there are some lakes which would benefit if it were exercised more.

## IX

## IN AND AROUND NORTHUMBERLAND

THE regrettable fact that I have never wetted a line in Derbyshire or Yorkshire might well seem a rather serious qualification of my claim to have wandered rather widely by English and Welsh waters. But to me, at any rate, there is some substantial compensation, in the memory of a genial month spent in the west Yorkshire dales. As this was the merry month of May, it was with painfully mixed feelings that I found myself, though not disqualified from any other form of activity, temporarily incapacitated from wielding a rod. It seems rather at odds with the flavour of these pages to frankly state that in the retrospect I am extremely glad it thus fell out. I was not altogether of that opinion at the time, though old enough and wise enough, I trust, to recognise that there was a good deal of virtue in the necessity. Moreover, I was engaged in the congenial task of assisting Mr. Sutton Palmer, the best delineator of mountain streams known to me, in celebrating these glories of the Yorkshire dales upon the printed page. I would not give a fig for the opinion of the Royal Academy on the interpretation of a mountain river. What do the vast majority of landscape painters know

about them? And, indeed, how often does their want of intimacy and sympathy hit you in the eye! Any one can paint the Thames, and the candid sense of impotency which so frankly inserts a backwater of that noble river in the heart of a quick-stream landscape seems almost commendable. But Mr. Sutton Palmer can paint for the fisherman who knows about these things, and has lived with them. One could almost fish a pool over on his canvas, and know exactly where to expect a rise. The woods and rocks and moors through which his life-like rivers run are those we see, and surely we ought to know. Perhaps they are too realistic for the rules of Chelsea studios; but these shibboleths are nothing to us, and have no significance for the lover of nature and those intimate with rapid waters and their atmosphere. And nature after all is a great deal more beautiful and much more important than Art with the biggest of A's. So when I look on Mr. Palmer's vistas of the Ure and Swale, the Wharfe or Ribble, the pleasant days on which I fished so much of them in fancy without a rod comes very vividly back to me, and I am grateful now for this, at the moment rather tantalising deprivation. For it has endowed me with a far more extended picture gallery of these beautiful dales of the West Riding than I should possess had I been able to concern myself with their trout.

Of Derbyshire streams I have neither fished, nor seen any but from the train, though the very edge of that county I associate oddly enough with two as pleasant days' trouting as I ever enjoyed in England. This was at Welbeck many years ago in the duke's

waters at Cresswell crags. These days were not consecutive, but in two succeeding years, in May and June respectively. They are only noteworthy for the curious relationship in weight and number of fish they bore to one another. On the first occasion two of us killed just fifty trout weighing twenty pounds. The next year the mayfly happened to be on, and though being caught unprepared and unprovided with patterns, the same friend and myself killed with other flies in the same waters twenty-five fish also weighing twenty pounds: exactly half the number and precisely the same aggregate weight! And as on each evening we had a three-mile tramp home to our quarters bearing our burden, though no doubt cheerfully, I have further reasons for remembering the incident. But did a tight basket strap ever really tire an angler?

This was just within Nottingham, a shire otherwise associated vaguely in my mind with wonderful winches holding hundreds of yards of line from which the natives hurl substantial baits of mysterious kinds with trained precision across leisurely expansive rivers. But our days were in the Dukeries, not on the Trent, a limestone region where trout seem to wax and flourish in every bit of water that will cover their back fin. As I have skirted Derbyshire thus briefly and memorably to myself in late years, so in boyhood, more frequently but with nothing approaching such baskets, have I plied a rod upon the edge of Yorkshire—on the Wear and upper Tees in the now besmirched palatinate of Durham. These two rivers rise in neighbouring wilds and run out of the high Durham moors

in two parallel valleys. The upper Wear, though even in those days disfigured here and there with mining villages and slightly tinged with lead hush, was a broad and beautiful river, rocky, rapid, and begirt with sylvan scenery. Some school friends of mine lived on its banks, and were wonderfully handy and knowing fishermen from boyhood onwards. They made their own rods, tied their own flies, and through the summer months always used horsehair. The Wear trout ran small, about four to the pound, with always better possibilities. But they were extremely shy, and in the summer months at any rate, during which my frequent and lengthy visits were generally paid, took a lot of catching. The small local school of fishermen to which my friends belonged were purists in their own way of a type which, though differently fashioned, could have almost given odds to the dry-fly purists of to-day. A rod procured at a tackle maker's was here anathema, and an object of scorn, that of any London maker of repute being held in especial contempt. And I am bound to say you could not have purchased anywhere in those days rods of such featherweight, balance, and driving-power all combined as were made by these lads and their neighbours. They were on the stiff side, and built to splice. Ferrules were regarded like anything else that came from a manufacturer's as Cockney abominations. These Arcadians were, in fact, twenty years ahead of their time; that was about all.

I can recall even at this hour the feel of those home-made rods. You could purchase any amount of similar weapons to-day, and of course infinitely smarter

in the make-up. But you couldn't buy one anything like them then. I well remember the self-abasement with which I used to compare my Exeter-built rods, models of lightness as they were regarded in my own small circle, with these others, these graceful but powerful little featherweights. Whether they would have stood a great strain I do not know, for they were rarely called upon to do so. Bowden's masterpieces were utterly condemned in these hypercritical circles as clumsy, wobbly, and top-heavy, though admitted to be an improvement on the ordinary 'Cockney' rod, by which I fear was meant the productions of Farlow and other such great men. When possible I was supplied with a 'proper rod,' for which indeed I was always truly grateful, and spared the sense of humiliation inseparable from waving an unscientific article of commerce over the sacred waters of the Wear. Here, too, I was first introduced to the single hair, and if there was a chestnut stallion domiciled in that part of the country I am sure the demands upon his tail must have reduced it to the most ignoble proportion. The flies were, I need hardly say, tied at home, and I can still remember the half-dozen popular varieties; for this type of purism dealt very little in scientific entomology, though like that of Mr. Stewart its flies did great things.

Local prejudices were intensely strong. They were not confined to rods, tackle, and flies, but even the landing-net there in vogue was the only possible variety that it was decent to be seen about with. Any other pattern wrote down its bearer as hopelessly outside the pale. This local sample had a stout shaft,

probably of ash, shod with a spike and a hook, and at the other end the net was strung on a large fixed hoop of wood. It was a tremendous net for quarter-pounders and an odd half-pounder, as it towered above the angler's head while he used it, like many others elsewhere, as a prop and support, for the Wear was a wading river. You couldn't wade the Wear without this particular type of implement. You might negotiate other rivers successfully perhaps, and rivers too, exactly like the Wear, but you couldn't fish the Durham stream properly without this tremendous accessory. It would have been wholly unorthodox. You might be all right with a short-handled net slung conveniently at your back for a time if you were prepared to outrage every local tradition. But you would be drowned some day to a certainty. It might be for years, but it wouldn't be for ever, that you would escape this untimely fate. And this in spite of the fact that waders were not yet in use up there and you could swim like a duck.

The champion fisherman of that neighbourhood who chiefly voiced this unwritten code, and even published part of it, was the headmaster of an almost derelict grammar school. He wrote a treatise on trout-fishing, and a very good one too, illustrated by himself with coloured plates of flies. He had scarcely, I think, ever fished any other river but the Wear and its tributaries, so that his utterances were unavoidably flavoured with limitations, to say nothing of prejudices. All rivers in the south of England, for instance, were sluggish canals, and all the trout fat and lethargic, and (if memory serves me) quite easy to catch, with the

uncanny flies of commerce purchased in Oxford Street or the Strand. What the dry-fly purist would say if he lit upon a stray edition of this now scarce work I cannot imagine. The author reserved, I remember, one of his most keenly pointed shafts of ridicule for all other landing-nets save those of the type above described. They were all 'cabbage nets,' which stamped their bearers as past hope. He was as fine an angler though, this old gentleman, as he was incompetent in his professional capacity, though he had only one hand, a condition which possibly accounted for his fiery and uncompromising attitude towards landing-nets. Perhaps circumstances had been too much for him, but the grammar school died of an atrophy like so many others in small places that had outlived their utility. So possibly the pedagogic energy and scholarship of this master-fisherman had never been put to the test. Perhaps he had never been extended!

When I first knew the place the school bell used still to ring the hours of work, and a stock local joke warned the stranger lurking near to have a care lest he should be borne down by the wild rush of one boy. My friends had sat at his feet before they went to a public school, at a more prosperous period when the total number of boys, inclusive of themselves, approached double figures, and they had many funny stories of the old man, for they were humorists as well as fishermen. He was engaged on his angling book at the period of their attendance, a task which he used to pursue in school hours, delightfully oblivious to the progress or the discipline of his little class. On one occasion during the time when he was more

immediately concerned with his illustrations, having called the class to order, he proceeded to the blackboard to chalk up an arithmetical problem the solution of which might peradventure keep them quiet for a little. But the absorption of his faculties in the *magnum opus* was apparently so complete that when he moved from the front of the board instead of the expected figures there was revealed to the delight of his tormentors the proportions of a noble trout. A bull trout, my friends used to say it was meant for, the *salmo eriox* being a regular autumn visitor to the waters of Wear and therefore an item in its literature. There was a great raid by the Education Commissioners about this time on derelict grammar schools, to the eventual extinction of many. It so happened that the commissioner who inspected this part of England was a family friend of ours and had some rare stories to tell of the humours that accompanied their deplorable conditions, including more than one case, I remember, where the headmaster, happy in his small fixed endowment, secretly paid a solitary scholar to absent himself. I remember well that our angling pedagogue on the Wear and his establishment caused the aforesaid commissioner immense entertainment, and stood out even in the treasure-house of oddities that his duties had incidentally provided and so richly stored.

We occasionally undertook a pilgrimage across the moors to the head-waters of the Tees, taking a pony along to carry our traps. Crossing over from St. John's, Weardale, and thence dropping down into Teesdale and the Rokeby country at Middleton,

we struck thence up the long valley road by High Force, and so on to Cauldron Snout and High-Cupnick. I have through all my life recalled the first glimpse of Teesdale from the high moors upon the eastern side, and the opening lines of Scott's description of it in *Rokeby*, which poem people were familiar with in those days, again and again come back to me :—

> Nor Tees alone in dawning bright
> Shall rush upon the ravished sight,
> But many a tributary stream
> Each for its own dark glen shall gleam.

For here just below you may see the trail of 'Silver Lune from Stainmore Wild,' and further away the line of the Greta, of notable name in those days even for Philistines impervious to the magic wand of the Wizard of the North. For one of the songs out of *Rokeby* had been in high favour, and our aunts and mothers, at any rate, had been wont to sing in drawing-rooms of 'How Brignall woods were fresh and fair, and Greta woods were green,' and how they 'would rather rove with Edmund there than reign an English queen.'

We used to take our rods with us and fish a bit in the Tees below Cauldron Snout, where it thunders down a ridge two hundred feet high from its long, strange, sluggish, meandering among the high bogs known as the Weald. As Yorkshire, Durham, and Westmoreland all meet at the foot of the falls, I must after all, I suppose, have wetted a line in Yorkshire. But I think our expeditions, particularly as they were in July, were prompted as much by a love of fine wild

country, which was deep-seated in all of us, as by any very serious designs on trout. I think the sombre, peaty depths of the Weald (*wheale* I believe originally), with possibilities more than hinted at by our accomplished friend the schoolmaster, was something of a magnet, though it proved fallacious. But beyond a few small fish picked out of the dark runs of the river below among the roundest and most slippery boulders I ever encountered in my life, there is really nothing to be said, so this excursion here into Teesdale and the back of the Pennines may be held, perhaps, as unjustifiable. A little inn sheltered us on one occasion. But on another, inspired with undue confidence by the pedagogue, we pinned our faith on a small farmhouse on the moor. Our welcome, however, if such it can be called, was of the dourest; so much so, that if it had not been nightfall, and hunger and even fatigue, hardy as we accounted ourselves, insistent, we should have turned our backs upon the rude inhospitable shelter and the churlish boors who so grudgingly entertained us without a moment's hesitation.

The rivers of Northumberland are fairly numerous, and the trouting burns more numerous still. I have fished at one time or another in most of the former and in some of the latter. As to the rivers, I may fairly say I know them *qua* rivers from the sea to their source. For all of them rise in the Cheviots, and all but the Till run eastward into the ocean. Some even of the burns cut out their own course and pay tribute to no lesser waters than those of the North Sea. And every burn and every river in Northumber-

land contains trout. Little more than a dozen miles above the pandemonium of Newcastle and the altogether forbidding look of the tidal Tyne with its besmirched industrial surroundings for a good part of that distance, trout and samlets may be seen rising in the clear, broad, stony shallows, and with no obvious reason under such quickly changed conditions why they should not be there and thus disport themselves. The Tyne, unless the English share in the lower Tweed be counted, is of course by far the largest river in the county. The Wansbeck, Coquet, Aln, and Till belong in size to altogether another class. Nay, after the Tyne has split into its north and south forks at Hexham, and begun to count seriously as a trout and salmon river, either branch would still more than hold its own in this respect against any of the sister streams. The river at Hexham just below the parting is of quite noble width, though as merry as a moorland burn. The bridge requires at least eight arches to span its currents, and the view across it to the old town beyond, crowned with its stately abbey, is one to be held ever in remembrance.

If you stand in the meadows a mile above, at the junction of the North and South Tyne, it is not difficult to understand why a vast proportion of the ascending salmon take the right-hand turn. Perhaps if the waters were in spate you would understand still better, and feel certain that if you were a salmon you would not hesitate for a moment; for while the more southerly flood is running a thick yellowy brown, the northern river is pouring in a volume of porter-coloured water redolent of the moorland and

ON THE COQUET NEAR ROTHBURY

the moss. Both are equally clear in normal weather, for the South Tyne, too, comes down from clear uplands, but like the Wear is slightly if not visibly tainted by various mines and works scattered along its lower course, though its Arcadian qualities and sometimes striking valley scenery are but little affected. At any rate it is an infinitely inferior trout and salmon river to its amber-tinted twin sister.

In company with a friend, I once fished the South Tyne for a whole day under the most superb conditions of wind and water. The woods, the rocks, the perfect colour of the buoyant stream, the tempered sunshine, the balmy air coupled with our own sanguine natures kept us from flagging. At the close of the day we had, I think, about half a dozen small trout between us. To be sure it was in August, and much must be forgiven that ill-omened month, but I always think of it as one of the pleasantest blank days I ever had. I have no doubt that if we had been up in the higher waters in Allandale we should have killed some fish, but I am talking now of the big river, not of its tributaries nor again of its own infant gambols in the hills. I had had my doubts, to be sure, of the class of river at such a season, despite its fair appearance. But my friend, hailing from a far south-western county, where trout rise after a flood at any and all seasons, egged me on. He added, I expect, to his store of experience! Our luncheon hour upon a pleasant shingly beach with a fine, woody cliff confronting us across the delicious swirls of the deceptive river was enlivened by the company of a local salmon fisher, obviously a gentleman-at-large. He stood beside us for a long while

without speaking, and as I thought with a touch of compassion in his eye. He evidently thought we were natural fools to be fly-fishing for trout at such a time. But in truth as it turned out if there was any sympathy going around to spare he was the most fitting recipient of it. He was a tall, ginger-whiskered man, with a salmon-rod of the dimensions of a telegraph post, and remained silent merely because no true Northumbrian ever makes the first overture if he has to wait all day. When I broke the ice he admitted to having done nothing, though a little consoled by the report of a fish having been killed two days previously at Haydon bridge, which did not suggest a high standard for the South Tyne. Before we had done with him, however, he had unfolded, perhaps not too willingly, a tale beside which our few hours of pleasant futility were as nothing; for he had fished the river steadily, so far as we could make out, for years, and to his everlasting credit admitted that he had never yet killed a salmon in it. Now a man who will voluntarily make that admission with no earthly reason for so doing, and every temptation to tell tall stories, is much more precious than a successful salmon-fisher. Later on we watched him work down a fine pool below us and drive his line out with all reasonable skill from the telegraph post, and were forced to conclude that either he was one of the unlucky ones of the earth or that very few salmon patronised the South Tyne. We hoped, too, he was a poet at least and saw things in the moving waters and the bordering woods, and so was happy.

But the North Tyne is a very different river, and

plenty of salmon and of sea trout, too, are killed when the water serves. There is also a good stock of brown trout, and the river being valuable is rather closely preserved for most of its course. For the last mile or so before the confluence the broad river, overhung on both sides by the woods of Warden, makes fine play, its amber waters churning furiously amid a prodigious barrier of rocks and ledges. It bisects the Roman wall just above at Cholerford, where the excavated remains of the great cavalry station of Chesters or Cilurnum and its Roman bridge still in the river attract visitors from all parts of the country. A little railroad runs up the North Tyne for a matter of some thirty miles, crossing eventually into Scotland through a wild pass of the Cheviots. It is still better, however, to pursue the river by road if you want to go high up the dale, as the scenery is always interesting, and if you care for such things every mile is marked by a castle, a peel tower, or some other martial relic of the old Border wars and raids.

For North Tynedale and its tributaries was the very heart and centre of the 'Riding country,' the land of the Herons, Swinburnes, Charltons, Robsons, and all the rest of them. So up past Haughton castle of the Swinburnes, in whose deep dungeon once upon a time a chief of the Armstrongs, languishing in durance vile, was literally forgotten, and so died of starvation; past Chipchase, where the Herons when official keepers of Tynedale kept their light cavalry police; past the hamlet of Wark, where the Scottish judges of assize sat when this was part of Scotland, the river beside you still brawling broad and lusty; past the mouth of

Rede, with all the bloody and romantic tale its streams repeat for those who have ears to hear. And thus continuing by a somewhat lessened stream for the burns that it has lost, though still a broad one, you will arrive at Bellingham. A big village much frequented by sheep and collie dogs, and the metropolis of the dale, is this, set in a wide-open bare country still thick with Charltons, Robsons, Hedleys, Telfers, Dodds, and all the old fighting and raiding names that ring down the whole garland of Border song. There is a good inn at Bellingham, and higher up the river towards Falstone and Scotland there are, or were, some miles of association or ticket water. I once spent a prodigiously hot fortnight here. For two days the thermometer stood at ninety degrees in the shade, which for a place high up in the heart of the southern Cheviots was a trifle disconcerting. Fishing, except with a worm, was out of the question. However, I admit, and without the slightest shame, a partiality for clear water worming for trout, having done a great deal of it as a young man in the clear mountain streams of the southern Alleghanies, where the thick foliage exalts it into something of an art.

Indeed, it is esteemed very much of an art in this north country, not on a level with fly-fishing, to be sure, but by no means to be dismissed from discussion as a mere pot-hunting or poaching business. But then one fishes with a worm, or ought to at times and seasons when the fly is practically useless, and only then upon rivers which are suitable for it. I should never, for example, have the slightest desire to worm the Kennet or the Wylie even if I had otherwise

embarked upon a career of crime. Nor do I ever feel the least inclination, even at the most depressing moments, to fish worm in what might be called midway rivers, such as the Teme, the Monnow, or the Lugg. It is the hard-bottomed, stony mountain rivers and burns, with their wilder seeming trout that alone invites the clear-water worm fisherman of the right sort. And fishing worm up the middle of a good-sized river, though I have done by comparison little of it, is more interesting to me than worming a burn, of which I have done a great deal. I need hardly say it has been always widely practised in the Border country. Far too much so indeed, for instead of confining the worm to the three summer months, it is freely used in the fly season—in April, May, and early June, on the open waters. Worm fishing in April is most unsportsmanlike, almost as bad as worming in discoloured flood water—the very lowest form of trouting. But in a river like the North Tyne, where the trout cease to rise, I fancy early in June and in a normal summer the river runs low and clear for most of the time; there, surely, up-stream worm-fishing provides a worthy and skilful method of enjoying many pleasant days, and killing fish in the very pink of condition, that though they might rise again in September, would be by that time falling sadly away. Not many south or west country fishermen know much of this branch of trouting, and most are inclined, as I have said before, to look on all worm-fishing as poaching.

Personally I do not like Stewart tackle. And by the same token that great fisherman did not use the worm very much himself, and was, I think, rather

amused to find some time before his death an arrangement of hooks, though no doubt he did use it, called by his name. Every trout fisherman in England and America knows the Stewart tackle; not one in fifty ever heard of the great Border angler who died forty years ago. I once found myself fishing beside him, and felt the same thrill I had experienced a year before at being in with W. G. Grace in a country match, who, by the way, returned my devotional attitude by running me out most flagrantly.

I prefer the single hook myself, perhaps from long use of it in North America. In burns one mainly fishes the pools, as they are small and all astir. But in rivers the *modus operandi* is to wade up stream and fish the shallower rapids, the quick waters, and the eddies. Rippling, stony shallows a foot deep that you would hardly throw a fly on are likely places with the worm. A very stiff, light fly-rod of about eleven feet is my preference for this work, and a fine cast of, say, six feet. A line a little longer than the rod can be readily cast by various methods, and that without making any appreciable commotion on the water, which is generally itself in a more or less lively state. One throws either straight up stream, or diagonally up to the right or left, but you will hook most of your fish right ahead of you. A trout fisherman's instinct, whether used to the worm or not, tells him his distance, and when and where he is out of sight, though it is remarkable how closely you can approach trout in broken water from immediately below them. The novice, in other respects trout-wise, soon learns by experience the sort of water in which fish take a worm

best, and speaking generally, it is not such as he would devote much attention to with a fly in the same state of the river. When the worm drops, it must be allowed to float down naturally towards you uninfluenced by the rod. A check to the movement of the gut is usually the only visible sign of a bite, not always easy to see in quick, broken water, though it is often accompanied by that other subconscious sensation of touch. It is well to wait three or four seconds, with a single hook, at any rate, before striking. Sometimes, however, the fish will move swiftly up-stream directly it seizes the worm, when the bite is of course much more obvious. It is quite pretty work, though, and perhaps not so easy of accomplishment as it may appear from this bald description. It is well to be up and doing betimes in bright weather, though the precise hour may be left to the inclinations of the angler. But if on the water by six or seven, you can generally count on the fish taking till about ten o'clock; for I am not concerned with the all-night fisherman, under which head fall so many of the working folk of the north country, who will get into the river after supper and fish up many miles through the night and early morning hours, and be back by train or cycle to their workshop, mine, or factory at the regulation hour. This is a destructive business, and to be deplored, particularly as this type of angler generally baskets everything, however small. It has been a regular practice, however, for all time that matters up here, though there are signs that in the general interests of the fishing public some limits may yet be set to it.

There is little of this in the North Tyne, for the simple reason that the river is nearly all preserved. I had the privilege on this occasion of a mile of salmon water belonging to a friend. As salmon-fishing was out of the question, he kindly allowed me to ply the worm for trout, and by due perseverance in early rising I had some very fair dishes, some of the fish running nearly up to a pound in weight, and was home again before the heat of the day had well begun, the only drawback to the entertainment being a white bull of militant disposition. It is surprising even in the matter of trouting what creatures of habit we are, and how susceptible to influences and traditions. Having wandered rather widely myself, I may fairly claim some catholicity in such matters, and can, at any rate, feel the atmosphere of all these various schools of opinion. I know well that the objection to the worm is very strong in many parts of the country where streams are identical with those of the north. Nobody knows much about it, to be sure, but there is a sort of tradition against it among gentleman anglers. But in the north there is no such general feeling, whether a man cares for it personally or not. It is regarded as a matter of course, and recognised as a scientific branch of the trouting art. It is only a pity that the habit of using the worm in the spring is not more deprecated, and wherever possible stopped.

There is a good deal of over-preserving in the southern half of Northumberland, or, I should perhaps say, preservation of the useless and fussy kind; this is partly due to so much of its trouting water being included in grouse-shooting tenancies, which nearly

always closes up even the smallest burn, regardless of fish logic; and partly perhaps to the prevalence of the *novus homo* on a large scale, to whom the mere sensation of ownership carries with it an undiscriminating desire to exercise its extreme rights, even when perfectly useless. I always remember a day granted me in a big burn by a rather magnificent gentleman of this type as an illustration of what I mean. The most respectable stranger would not, I am sure, have stood the ghost of a chance of getting a permit, but as a matter of fact my introduction was rather an intimate one, and it produced a letter giving me one day in the precious burn, of which there was about three miles, very rough and heavily wooded in character. I don't suppose the owner ever fished it in his life, though very likely he had a salmon river in Norway, to which he proceeded in his own steam yacht. The water was in good order, and it was a beautiful stream and of a fair size. I fished up the whole three miles, chiefly in the water, for the foliage, which was beautiful, intrenched it nearly everywhere. It took me about eight hours to cover it. I am quite certain that I rose over a thousand fish, for they were coming extraordinarily short, and constantly two at a time, and I am equally certain that I did not see six of a quarter of a pound in weight the whole day. The little river was simply crammed with fingerlings, and hopelessly over-stocked, a state of things I should say, unnatural to it, and indeed, as I was told, of recent development. Yet my friend's friend gave me *one* day with great ceremony. It is true that one day was enough, and more than enough,

so far as fishing went; but that is not the point. If this stream were thrown open for three years it might possibly improve. It would, at any rate, entertain the public, and there is nothing on its shores, being quite wild, that the humble angler, even if so disposed, could conceivably damage. But such a suggestion, I am quite sure, would be received with horror and indignation.

To return, however, to the North Tyne. There is another fifteen miles of the river above Bellingham, before it shrinks to a wee burn amid the wilds of Kielder, the Duke of Northumberland's shooting-box on the Scottish border. The little railway ascends the valley, as I have said, and a tolerable road follows the river, constantly reinforced by moorland burns, to its source. How much ticket water there is about Falstone, where there is also an inn, I do not know, but I think some miles, and it looks very attractive. This is in truth a great country. Once mounted up on the ledge of moorland that on its south-western side overlooks the dale, all beyond is solitude of a most impressive kind—a great waste of heath, peat-moss, and sheep pasture, a low, rolling prairie plateau rather than hills, with the high bluffs that carry the Roman wall along their craggy summits, upon the hither side of the South Tyne, dimly cutting the sky-line. In all this wide angle between the two forks of Tyne, a dozen to twenty miles across, with its base resting on the lofty hills of the Scottish border, there is practically nothing but a shepherd's cottage standing forlorn here and there, and along its edges the occasional homestead of some great sheep farmer. Grouse, plovers,

curlews, wildfowl, and black-faced sheep are the only other occupants of the waste, while colonies of small black-headed gulls breed by its little tarns, and the larger non-gregarious species, hated of the grouse preserver, haunts its spaces and works havoc by the way on burns and spawning beds. This was in fact the wild waste over which the Roman sentinels looked northward for some three centuries. And as you stand on that great natural barrier to-day, on the broad top of the remnant of the wall which continuously caps it, and look out towards the North Tyne, you might well fancy for the all-pervading desolation that the centuries had stood still.

Upon the other side of the river high moors and sheepwalks heave away to the parallel valley of the Rede, where Hotspur and Douglas met in the immortal fight of Otterburn, and a hundred other forgotten heroes fought and bled. I remember how gloriously on the eve of these warm days the sun used to sink below the distant mountain rampart which divides the kingdoms once so bitterly hostile, and how quickly on its steps the harvest moon later on rekindled this great, silent, mysterious country with a pale refulgence of the day. There are no tourists here. You are as far perhaps from the madding crowd as you can betake yourself anywhere in England, by rail at any rate, though trains are so few that they really amount to nothing as a disturbing factor. I doubt, too, if motorists much fancy the road which leads over Kielder into Liddesdale. A favourite route, however—indeed one of the main arteries into Scotland—lies up Redesdale, and over the Carter Fell, passing the great

reservoir at the head of Rede, which has been made for Newcastle, and is full, by the way, of free-rising trout.

It is a great change from here to the country of the Till, the 'sullen Till' of Scott's *Marmion*. Rising in the Cheviots, about half-way down their course, and pointing for the eastern shore, it seems to flinch in almost infancy from the prospect of breaking through the isolated block of upland that may be called the Chillingham moors, a feat performed by its cradle neighbour, the Aln. But the Till is a gentle stream, nearly always ill-suited for aggressive action and breaking its way through mountain ridges. So it turns away to the open north, and, running for some miles under its cradle name of Breamish, waters Chillingham on its way; and from thence, in a succession of sinuous bends, prattles cheerily on to the broad, flat pasture-lands below Wooler. Here, beneath the shadow of the most northerly and loftiest section of the Cheviots, it sets its face through endless green flats for Flodden field and the Tweed. And as if always eager to prolong its easy journeying through these fat haughs, it twists from edge to edge for no apparent purpose, and with a sinuosity that cuts a most eccentric figure on a map. Rippling gently over gravelly shallows of singularly lustrous colouring and varied hue, it loiters again and again, so slight is its fall in sullen deeps, or dubs, into which the soft, overhanging red banks seem for ever toppling. Unlike any other Northumbrian river, the Till might almost have been imported straight from Herefordshire, so much in its banks, its colouring, its paces, and its

bottom does it resemble the Lugg or the Teme. Like these rivers, too, when it is absolutely forced, as in its last mile or two, to travel through a gorge on a rocky bottom, it can play the part of a mountain river as well as any.

Like the Teme and the Lugg, too, the Till is a great grayling stream. But the adjective in the Till's case requires a deal of qualification. The difference indeed between the two Welsh border rivers and this one is interesting. The former are natural grayling streams in which trout and grayling always flourished side by side, with no perceptible clashing of interests. But less than twenty years ago there was not a grayling in the Till or anywhere near it. It was a very good trout stream indeed. It is now crammed with grayling, which were introduced, and the trouting is almost worthless from below Chillingham down to Ford at any rate. Worse still, the grayling run rather small—three to the pound would, I think, be a flattering estimate. Still worse, they can hardly be called good risers. Yet in its principal tributary, the Glen, which runs in at Ewart park, and is also full of grayling, the latter rise splendidly. There are two or three miles of association fishing in the Till below Wooler, at which picturesque Cheviot town I once spent an autumn month. It was a dry season, and consequently perfect grayling weather. I frequently fished this stretch as well as some private water below it with fly—as pleasant and easy a river of its kind to fish as you may find anywhere. I don't think I ever killed ten at one venture, and sometimes my efforts were next to useless though the river was stiff with fish. The

natives were mainly worming, so I could not make comparisons. But I had a day in the Glen, which in the lower part where I fished it is of similar quality to the main stream, and I killed thirty-four fish weighing sixteen pounds, and gave up before I had finished either the day or the water, for the simple reason that I couldn't carry any more. This was some years ago. During this past summer a friend of mine and excellent fisherman went to Wooler, where, by the way, there is now a capital hotel. His experience of the Till was precisely mine. He, too, had a day in the Glen and basketed seventy. They did not run so large as mine, being earlier in the season, but included a good many trout and a sea trout or two.

Where grayling are not indigenous, they prove but a doubtful blessing to a trout stream in which they thrive. They have ruined a large part of the Till, and except to the worm fisher provided a very poor substitute as risers. They have gone far to ruin the Glen, so far as they have succeeded in ascending it. And the Glen was one of the very finest trout streams on the whole Border. That well-known Border fisherman, the late Mr. Henderson, author of *My Life as an Angler*, gave it, all things considered, the place of honour among Northumbrian streams. If the grayling furnish but indifferent baskets to the fly fisherman on the Till, they provide the devotee of the 'running worm and tooth-pick float' abundant sport. This is a Yorkshire practice, and is something of an art in itself. I have watched its professors at work, and with much interest. The water selected is a running gravelly stream, such as the Till abounds in, the hook

is of the smallest, mounted on a cast of the finest drawn gut, and the float of the diminutive pattern colloquially known as a tooth-pick. The *modus operandi* is to let the worm trail along close to the bottom, and to strike at the very first twitch of the tiny float. The fine quality of the gut makes striking a delicate operation, while a strong November or December grayling will for the same reason put up a big fight. And these are the months most affected by the artists of this craft. The local fishermen were sedulously cultivating it when I was last on the Till, fired by the performances of two experts from Yorkshire, who, they assured me, had taken twenty or thirty pounds of grayling in a day from two or three hundred yards of water. Possibly a large company of qualified locals proceeding at that rate have reduced the stock of grayling in the Till, but I doubt it. Salmon, sea trout, and bull trout run up the river and its tributaries in the summer and autumn, though I do not think are taken in very appreciable numbers. It is quite a sight to watch the latter leaping the dam on the Wooler burn, a large confluent of the Till, which runs down from the Cheviots, and not, I think, patronised by grayling for its impetuous character.

My friend and neighbour above mentioned in connection with a fine basket of grayling on the Glen—the first, by the way, he had ever caught in his life—is a man to whom notable feats have been frequently vouchsafed, and he had a successful adventure with a sea trout a day or two after on the same river, the like of which I have never known. As the fish is snug in a glass case within a few hundred yards of me as I

write, with the fly that captured him decorating the spot where he was hooked, I may tell of the adventure, albeit another man's, with a clear conscience. My friend was bred a fisherman from youth up in that noble county of Brecon, upon the banks of the Wye and Yrfon. I was very glad to have been the indirect means of providing him with one of those adventures with which fortune seems to favour him, and that he is well qualified not to let slip. For on the occasion in question—only the other day, in fact—he was fishing some private water near Coupland castle, up the Glen, and above the habitat of the grayling. Being August, and the trout, though the water was in condition, proving sulky, the moving of a sea trout prompted him to put on a small sea-trout fly. Shortly afterwards he rose and hooked, as it so proved, in the side, and much nearer the gills than the tail, what he soon took for granted to be a salmon. The Glen here is a small stream readily commanded by an average length of line on a ten-foot rod, which was in fact on this occasion my friend's weapon. The scene of action was tolerably open, though with bushes here and there on the very considerable stretch over which the battle was waged. He soon saw that he had something like a ten-pounder on, and quickly discovered that it was hooked in the side, a pretty formidable prospect in a small stream not free of bushes with light tackle. The encounter lasted an hour and a half. The fish leaped continually. Once he jumped clean into the middle of an alder bush, and by the mercy of providence, who watches over the fortunate to whom, like my friend, are granted great adventures, fell

through the foliage into the water again without mishap! Being out for small trout, my friend had no landing-net, and ultimately, to cut short the story, and at a very long distance from where he hooked the fish, he tailed it successfully in a suitable place. It proved to be a sea trout weighing nine pounds, the largest that had ever been killed in that country. It needs no telling that Wooler was agog with the event, particularly the other fishermen staying at the hotel. Some of them, not a little jealous that a stranger from the far south had achieved such a triumph, were sufficiently lacking in logic and humour to lay ingenuous stress on the fact that the fish had been foul-hooked! If it had not been, the capture would be a noteworthy local incident, but assuredly not worth the telling here. Such a fish might, of course, have been hooked by any one. If fastened in the mouth it might have been landed by any good fisherman, but a small hook in the side of such a powerful fish is quite another matter. I frankly admit I envy my friend his performance immensely, though I trust ungrudgingly, and I am glad to think that I can look upon that fish any day.

His other adventure was of a different character, and took place two or three years ago in Brittany, where he was sketching, though with a trout rod, of course, among his effects. Lured by representations of a fictitious or over-sanguine character and the apparent moderation of the figure, he rented a stretch of what under happier circumstances no doubt would have been a trout stream. It soon became evident that whatever it might once have been, it no longer merited

such a designation. There was nothing in that; many of us have been taken in by the alluring look of Norman and Breton streams and their eloquent local advocates. I was once myself granted permission by its absentee proprietor to fish a lovely purling stream in Normandy. Indeed there was a keeper on the river bank, and I had a letter to him, so of course considered myself in clover. That keeper was well worth knowing, for he was a great original, so also was he, I fear, a scandalously unfaithful steward. He talked rather big about the poachers, 'the *bracconiers*.' When I asked him how he handled them he took down a cavalry sabre from over the chimney, drew it from its sheath, and waved it in dramatic fashion. I soon discovered that though it was happy May time there were practically no trout in the stream, whereupon my innkeeper informed me as a dead secret that he could have told me that before, which was annoying, and furthermore that the water was regularly netted by poachers, the keeper himself taking a leading hand in the operation.

But to return to my friend's much more exciting story—two days before his return to England, having abandoned in disgust his leased fishing, he was walking by the side of quite a large river, the name of which I forget, but he describes it as about the size of one of our larger chalk streams, and of rather deep, slow, gliding current. The populace, and it was near a town, plied their rude art upon it with worm, grasshopper, and suchlike lures attached to the clumsiest tackle. And they were all after trout, the river being a natural trout stream. But they scarcely ever caught anything, and what inspired my friend to think of making

one of such a company under such unpromising conditions he hardly knows himself. But at any rate the next day he brought his rod and, luckily, his creel and landing-net along on the off chance of catching a trout. He put up a fine cast and two small flies and proceeded to fish down stream, being by the way a great believer in that method. To his amazement he began to catch fish almost at once, and good ones too, and more wonderful still, to shorten the tale, he had one of the days of his life. He filled his basket with beautiful trout from half a pound to a pound in weight, the natives on the bank in the meanwhile plying their lures in vain, and regarding him with amazed disgust. His catch supplied the whole hotel where he was one of a large number of guests, being August time, which makes his good fortune still more remarkable. Even this, however, was not all. It might conceivably have been one of those rare days in which all the fish in the river seem to go mad, but my friend went back the next day and repeated the performance. This was the last occasion on which he saw the river as his time was up. He hopes to return some day! The French anglers, some of whom with empty baskets watched this astonishing performance, were thunderstruck, and no wonder, and put the Englishman down as a sorcerer; for the Bretons doubtless believe in such survivals. With the second day they began to show marked signs of disapproval, and tried to frighten him with stories of a malignant bull, and no doubt they breathed freely when they found the magician had really gone.

It is a quite remarkable instance of how fish that

have been worried to death with clumsy methods will come with avidity at fine tackle properly presented to them. If it had been a dry-fly performance, it would not have been so extraordinary. But my friend fished wet as related, and down stream with two flies. I tell him it is a mercy his wife was with him. For though a wife's evidence in criminal cases is, I believe, inadmissible on her husband's behalf, in fishing cases I regard it as much the most valuable of all. Judging from my own experience of anglers' wives their presence is the most effective curb to the natural growth of a fish story, and they have a marvellous memory for blank days which their men-folk have forgotten. The hero of these well-authenticated triumphs is, as I said, a believer in down-stream fishing. Occasionally he goes into Dorsetshire and fishes a dry-fly water for heavy trout with some dry-fly friends. He tells me he often kills more than they do, with two wet flies down stream. I have tried to make him understand the egregious nature of the crime he is perpetrating. But it is of no use, for he doesn't even know what a dry-fly purist means.

Higher up the Till in the Chillingham castle water the trout would appear to hold their own more successfully against the grayling, judging from a fair basket I once killed there. Fortunately for any angler who has that privilege the river doesn't run through the park. A Welsh bull is bad enough, but from what I have seen and heard of these famous wild cattle a day's fishing among them would not justify the classic designation of angling as the contemplative man's recreation.

The great steep wall of the Cheviot, rising here to two thousand seven hundred feet, beautifully overhangs the flat vale of the meandering Till, and but a mill or so distant from its course. The rugged hill of Homildon is the first buttress of the range, rock-ribbed and heath-crowned, where the long-bow achieved probably the greatest triumph in its whole history; for here seventeen hundred trained archers, mainly Welsh mercenaries under Hotspur, utterly paralysed, disorganised, and finally routed a brave Scottish army of ten thousand men, by their terrible and disciplined shooting. In the meadows, too, by the Till under Wooler lay the English army the night before the eve of Flodden, soaked to the skin and out of provisions. High above the river, seven miles to the northward, the ridge of Flodden rears its fir-crowned head, easily visible from here, as were the camp-fires and tents of the Scottish army on its summit to the victors of that immortal fight. And as we travel down stream towards it for three miles, the Glen comes winding in beside the wide woods of Ewart, planted by Count Horace St. Paul, who, banished in youth for killing a man in a duel, went from its peel tower manor-house to achieve fame as a soldier and diplomatist in the Austrian service, eventually returning to live and die under its roof about a century ago. And lower down still, where the river growing deeper and slower earned from Scott its title of the 'Sullen Till,' we have Ford castle, where King James slept before the battle of Flodden, and where Surrey on the morning of the fight crossed the swollen ford. And then, leaving on our left the long slope of Branxton hill on which eighty

thousand men met in the fiercest combat ever waged on English soil, when twenty thousand fell in about three hours, we are soon at Twizel bridge within a short mile of Tweed.

Here, for some distance above and again below the broad stone arch over which the advanced right wing of Surrey's army crossed to double back on Flodden, the Till, abandoning her gentle habit, moves more briskly through woody gorges. And, as might be expected, the trout again assert themselves not only in numbers but in size, probably reinforced from the neighbouring Tweed. A local friend of mine not so very long ago had a wonderful day here in the castle water, including a dozen or more fish of a pound weight and upwards. Mr. Henderson tells of a day affording a succession of much heavier trout even than this seventy years ago. The roach nuisance, too, is being felt in the Till, which is not surprising, seeing that it has become a very serious matter in the Tweed, much worse indeed than the grayling, whose increasing prominence in the great Border river is deplored by many. The roach is supposed to have been introduced by pike fishermen using it as live bait. Their fecundity is phenomenal, and is a cause, I believe, of real anxiety to the Fishery Board, who institute vigorous campaigns against them. The objection to grayling is, of course, relative and qualified. But that the fish food of bright Border rivers should be laid under heavy tribute by roach is an almost unthinkable outrage. The Till, as I have said, makes a great effort in its last rush through Twizel woods into Tweed to redeem its character for sloth. But

Tweed is not to be taken in by this death-bed repentance, and everybody knows the little passage-of-arms the two rivers engage in at their confluence :—

Said Tweed to Till,
'What gars ye rin sae still?'
Said Till to Tweed,
'Though ye rin wi' speed
And I rin slaw,
Whar ye droon ae man
I droon twa.'

The world hears much of Tweed salmon, but nothing of Tweed trout. They are noble but capricious fellows, not scarce monsters, but fairly plentiful, and strenuous pounders too, fighting as becomes the fish of such a river. Between Kelso and Berwick, at any rate, this usually implies a boat, and when Tweed trout come on the feed it means an hour or two of sport such as seems to live in the memory. Even within four miles of Berwick such hours and moments are not infrequent, and anglers well known to me are sometimes thus blest. For myself, fairly well as I know the river, opportunities for this further intimacy have been withheld. Life, alas! unless you have nothing else to do, is much too short for all the pleasant schemes that hope lays up for some future day. The same, so far as I am concerned, applies to the Coquet, though the disrepute as regards trout into which that famous river has of late years fallen may alleviate one's regrets. No river in the past has been so closely identified with Northumbrian angling lore as the Coquet. None have inspired such a garland of praise in prose and verse from Northumbrian pens, and there

is no stream in the county more calculated to do so. Salmon and sea trout are, I believe, more plentiful than of old, and to this fact some attribute the notorious decline over much of it of a once great trout river. If this indeed be so, it is a pity. The few days on which 'sea fish,' as they call them in Northumberland, afford sport are a poor exchange for the months in which trout give pleasure to a greater number, and, on the whole, demand more skill in the catching. The once fine water from Rothbury down is now full, I am told, of fingerlings and samlets, and respectable fish are hard to come at. The Coquet has been the treasured haunt of many famous north countrymen. Bewick, the great wood engraver, for one was a keen fisherman, and its constant habitué; so were Roxby, Joseph Crawhall, Henderson, Doubleday, and others. Its streams and pools are beautiful, and its waters carry to the sea the fine colour of their Cheviot source. There are no grayling, nor, I think, any coarse fish here, nor is there any contamination, nor any serious poaching. And it is as melancholy, as well as a little mysterious, that so renowned a stream should have fallen away so deplorably, as all its friends report. Any one familiar with the Great Northern route to Edinburgh will recall that beautiful glimpse of the Coquet where the train strides it a few miles south of Alnwick, and what a fine view seaward you get just here of Warkworth castle, whose noble ruins are reflected in the lowest reach of the river.

Coquet—for Northumbrians, like the Scots, often drop the article in alluding to their rivers, conveying therein a pleasant suggestion of intimacy and affection

—Coquet, then, rises also in the Cheviots, not far from Rede, and pursues her way through the same class of scenery and boasts the same stirring story as the Tynes. But none, as before stated, have by anglers been so much sung of, Robert Roxby in the first half of the last century being perhaps the laureate of the band, and certainly the editor of most of the Coquet poets :—

I will sing of the Coquet, the dearest of themes,
The haunt of the fisher, the first of a' streams;
There's nane like the Coquet in a' the king's land
From the white cliffs of Dover to North Britain's strand.

The elder Crawhall, artist, poet, angler, and humorist, is the most famous of the Coquet group, and inspirer of Charles Keene, scores of whose well-known jokes in *Punch* came from his Newcastle friend. With the latter's *Completest Angling Booke* all fishermen of a literary turn are familiar, at least by name. I fear if these worthies were to return to the Coquet to-day they would not sound the eulogistic note with anything like such fervour. But I am sure till quite recent times it was not undeserved.

A fine, lusty, peat-tinged stream, after a long pilgrimage through fern and heath-clad uplands, amid which Scott laid the opening chapters of *Rob Roy* and the home of Diana Vernon, the river finally leaves the Cheviots at the pleasant town of Rothbury, which nestles beneath their outer ramparts, just here of considerable height and more than considerable shapeliness. Thence for fifteen miles the river urges its streams over a clean, rocky bottom, through the

undulating lowlands of Northumberland to the sea. Coquet, it may be said again, holds the affections of Northumbrians, I think, above all their rivers. There is a sort of feeling that it is, even more so than others, their representative stream, partly perhaps because it flows through the heart of the county, and is more familiar than the remoter dales of Tyne. Like them, its glens are rich in story, and thickly strewn with the relics of a fighting age, while it finds its fitting end beneath the great star-shaped keep with eight lofty-clustered towers that was built by Hotspur's father in the third Edward's stirring days. Warkworth was the chief seat of the Percies before Alnwick was restored in the eighteenth century. It is a deathless reminder of two great English victories—Crecy and Neville's Cross; for it was while the king was winning the former that Henry Percy, Warden of the March, won the latter against the invading Scots, for which the money to build Warkworth was the royal and well-earned reward. Here, too, it will be remembered, Shakespeare lays the opening scene in *Henry IV.*, when Hotspur's wife Kate tries to worm from him the secret of those moody humours and restless nights which ultimately led to the cataclysm at Shrewsbury, and ended there for good.

The observant railway traveller before invoked will be also familiar with the little seaside town of Alnmouth, clustering picturesquely above the Aln, as well as with the winding course of that river through its green meadows from high-perched embattled Alnwick to the sea. There is a fair run of sea trout and salmon up here, and much of the water is accessible

through an association, like so much of the lower Coquet. Below Alnwick castle, however, in that beautiful demesne of Hulne park, the Aln has become more of a brawling, rocky trout stream, and for two or three miles sings through as charming a blend of art and nature as one might wish to see. Having exhausted the beauties of the park, which contains lofty hills, gracefully clad with fine timber, native and exotic, and two ruined abbeys, besides herds of deer and Highland cattle, I returned there upon another day with permission to fish it, in which matter the duke is very generous. I had been told by my angling friends and acquaintances in the country that a good day there meant forty to fifty quarter-pounders. Mine was a September day in a dry spell. I did not look for any such returns, and was not disappointed with a dozen and a half, for the compensations of fishing amid that beautiful Arcady were considerable. It struck me as rather odd that the trout were nearly all the same size, but it suggested the possibility that there were rather too many of them in the stream.

I had no intention of writing an angling guide to the rivers of Northumberland in the space of a chapter, but I find that the Wansbeck is literally the only one in the county I have made no allusion to, and it has always a rather tender place in my memory, though I have only fished it once in my life. It is not for the achievements of that solitary day it holds this cherished position, though those being satisfactory no doubt lent flavour to the occasion. But at the moment I had just returned from a residence abroad of ten years, which in early life is a long time. I had caught, to be

sure, heaps of trout, and those, moreover, in no unpleasant exile. I had caught them, too, amid surroundings that for beauty as such could not be surpassed, I believe, upon the face of the earth. They had come out of pellucid rocky streams, amid mountain forests of rich foliage and exquisite splendour, thickly carpeted with the dazzling bloom of rhododendrons and kalmia. I had almost come to fancy myself cured of all regrets for the streams and scenes of youth; and I had not thrown a fly on a British stream since I had reeled up my line on the Whiteadder for the last time one April day just a decade ago. On the occasion in question I had run up very soon after my return home to Newcastle to spend a couple of days with the most intimate friend of my childhood and youth. We had, in fact, been almost reared together, and then afterwards as school friends on those rare occasions when cricket or football was in abeyance and a whole day was available, had been wont to make adventurous pilgrimages in pursuit of trout or even meaner prey. So it seemed only fitting and natural when I found that one of my two days in the north was set aside for a fishing excursion and that old days—for they seemed very much so at two-and-thirty—were to be thus commemorated. It was a felicitous coincidence, too, that that very last day with the trout in the old country, above alluded to, had been enjoyed together.

So off we went by an evening train from Newcastle. For myself I knew nothing whatever of Northumberland at that period, while my companion from the nature of his duties already knew every inch of it.

We changed at Morpeth, took the branch line, and got out at what I have since identified as Scott's Gap station. We spent the night at a friend's house near by, and in the morning sallied forth to a tributary of the Wansbeck, which I remember was in capital order. What I most recall, however, is the delight of the old sensations once again, and how it all came upon me in a moment that, without admitting it, I had been in a trouting sense homesick all these years. It was a cool, breezy summer day, with glints of sunshine, and the raindrops still sparkled in the leaves and upon the grass. There were scents you never get a whiff of out of England, and a chorus of sound you never hear out of Britain. There were the grey but glorious moors once more, the wide half-boggy pasture fields, the soft, fresh, moist air that is nowhere else quite the same. A fig for your unbroken sunshine and tangled forests, with or without the snakes and mosquitoes and all the rest of it, I shouted in my thoughts at any rate, and meant it and still mean it; for I was a true-born Briton after all, and there is no prejudice in these worthy ingrained preferences. They are much too deep for anything so common as that. Give to me always and all the time the atmosphere that so vastly helps to impart an indescribable scenic charm to Britain, as every discerning alien admits; that covers it with a sward which is to them beyond anything they have ever dreamed of, that gives a mystery to the mountain and a character to the moor, all and absolutely their own. Let the hot-house folk who do not understand these things, degenerate sons of a northern race, hunt the sun around the world, and curse if they choose what

to sound country-loving folk at any rate, and for anglers beyond any doubt, is the finest climate in the world!

I remember with what delight I heard the curlews call once more and the plovers cry and flushed a black-cock in the 'white grass' on the way to the stream. And what joy it was to see again the grey wagtail preening herself on the shingle of the brook edge, the sandpiper scudding along its surface, the white-breasted dipper nodding at one as of old from a mossy rock, the kindly odours, the gracious look of the brook-side that never knew the meaning of those scorching agencies, fierce heat or fierce cold as most of the world understands them, all seemed to welcome one home again as to a place where one really belongs.

Yes, indeed, this was the true country for the angler or the sportsman of any kind, where there is practically not a day in the whole year when active out-door life is unavailable! It was kind, too, of the fish to signalise such an otherwise auspicious day, since it was a July one, by rising really well. At any rate we had half a basketful apiece of sizeable little trout, when the exigencies of train-time put an end to our sport. The only cloud over this to me rather memorable day was the feeling that it was but an interlude not to be repeated perhaps for years. Had I dreamed it was but the prelude to thirty years, at any rate, of reasonable enjoyment of such delights, what a day it would have been! On the other hand, what a day had I known that, when we parted that evening on the Morpeth platform, I should never see my old friend and playmate again in this world! Being for the first reason in rather sentimental mood, I sat down when I got

home and wrote a little sketch entitled ' A Northumbrian stream, from a long-exiled angler's point of view,' and sent it to Mr. John Morley, as he then was, who as editor of the *Pall Mall* and *Macmillan's Magazine* was always most kindly hospitable to my intermittent contributions on out-door matters, and it was printed next day.

## X

## THE WHITEADDER AND LAUDERDALE

NOBODY in the south has ever heard of the Whiteadder, and that very fact to my thinking is one of its many charms. There would be nothing whatever in such obscurity if this were a river in Sutherlandshire or the Hebrides. But it is remarkable that a trouting stream which runs a broad, brawling course for forty miles, and at its best points is virtually within sound of the London and Edinburgh mail trains, should thus have kept itself to itself, and its very name unknown to the public ear. For that a hungry angling public, outside that which dwells between, let us say, Edinburgh and Newcastle inclusive, has never heard of it is a fact that a sufficiently wide acquaintance among the fraternity enables me to set down with tolerable confidence. The humour of the situation—and I think there is some humour in it—is in no way lessened by the further fact that this really noble river has been for all time free to any one who likes to fish it, the whole way from its wild infancy in the high moors to its junction with the Tweed in sight of Berwick. To clinch the matter, lest such an incredible state of affairs should breed a suspicion in the reader's mind that the river is un-

worthy of attention, I may say at once that in almost any part of it baskets of from twelve to fifteen pounds of trout are killed tolerably often in every season. I fancy most of us are just a little more than content if we are fortunate enough to stagger home under so respectable a burden from any club, association, or preserved water in the hill countries of England or Wales! I must hasten, however, to take the edge off any justifiable scepticism of the southern reader by affirming that the Whiteadder is the finest *natural* trout stream of its class known to me in this island, though the Cardiganshire Teifi may tug perhaps a little at my conscience in giving utterance to this pious opinion. But then the latter is mainly preserved, though against this must be set the lamentable fact that nefarious poachers abound in Wales.

In south-eastern Scotland, on the other hand, if rod fishermen are as legion, trout poaching, for that very reason an anti-popular pursuit, is tolerably well kept under. If I had to fish for a wager—which Heaven forbid!—and had the choice of the Teifi or the Whiteadder, I should certainly choose the former, merely as a preserved river, while the latter, judged by a south country standard, is flogged to death. But this estimate of the Whiteadder as the finest trout stream known to me is formed on two accounts:—firstly, as presenting a surface continuously and uninterruptedly alluring to cast one's flies upon, and secondly, for the astounding fertility which has resisted the unchecked onslaught of generations of skilled anglers. I should be inclined to think it possessed some magic qualities, some supernatural fecundity, if it were not

for some other streams of the Eastern March, endowed with the same amazingly recuperative powers, such, for example, as the Blackadder and the Leader. Whether we have any rivers in Yorkshire, Wales, or Devonshire that would stand this treatment it would be extremely interesting to know, though futile to inquire. For neither is any opportunity for comparison afforded, nor is anywhere to be found such a fishing population among the humbler classes. But if these Border rivers have in truth any such exceptionally productive qualities, there is absolutely nothing in their appearance to distinguish them from scores of similar ones south of the Tweed. They have their duplicates by the dozen in other hill and mountain regions. There is nothing in either the wild moorlands of Berwickshire or in its cultivated lowlands to suggest greater fecundity in its trout streams than in the moors and lowlands of Yorkshire, Montgomery, or Cardigan. What, then, can it be, and is all our rather strict and almost timid preservation of rapid waters against fair fishing just so much moonshine? I have maintained in a former chapter that a good deal of it is. But the Whiteadder, the Blackadder, and the Leader confound me utterly, knowing intimately, as I do, the tremendous toll that is annually levied on them, not merely with fly, but with bait of every description.

My first acquaintance with the Whiteadder was made on leaving college, now, alas! over forty years ago, and the study of agriculture from the vantage-point of a famous East Lothian farm was the indirect cause of introduction. I had never before been north

of the Tweed, and an otherwise pleasant prospect was not a little clouded by the report of an old comrade and most skilful angler, with two years' experience of my future quarters, that there was no fishing within reach. Now to go to Scotland and leave all trouting behind seemed an absurd anachronism, keen fisherman and hardy soul as I knew my friend to be, and not few the miles that we had tramped together after trout. But I took some comfort in the recollection that he was not of an inquiring mind, nor alert for things outside the range of a day's compass, though he could make this a pretty wide one. So I reached out for the map, and was at once relieved to find that I had measured him correctly; for within a dozen miles by surface scale of my future domicile there showed dark upon the map the expansive uplands of the Lammermuirs, honeycombed with the thin trail of streams. Even at one-and-twenty I was at once topographer and angler enough to know that on the Scottish border those streams spelled trout, and that, humanly speaking, nothing not easily surmountable would prevent my some day or other getting at them.

And thus of course it proved. When after a long winter day's journey and a late arrival I looked out in the morning from my bedroom window over the flat East Lothian land, there they were sure enough, the hills of the map sweeping the whole horizon—dark rolling masses, obviously grouse moors, riven at intervals with deep ravines, and, distant though they were, eloquent to any fisherman's eye of potential trout streams. That was January, and such a cold one. I well remember that the roar of the curling-

stones with its accompanying babel of hearty Doric echoed all through the month and far into February. Nobody down on the coast knew anything to speak of about the interior of these hills, or indeed anything about trout, as is the way of local people. But before the end of March, so eager was I, in that glorious hey-day of youth, when all the world was fresh and new, an oyster to be opened, I had already discovered a snug inn in the heart of the moors, and was actually hauling out, to my amazement, big bull-trout kelts in the finest-looking river I had as yet ever fished. As Devonshire trout rose well in March, and as this to my eyes seemed a replica of Exmoor, I had assumed they would be equally accommodating here. But to shorten the story, I was in due course on terms of more or less intimacy with most of the streams and burns in these glorious hills, finding means of getting to them for two or three days at a time, on and off, throughout two whole fishing seasons. They were all free water then, as they mainly are now, and despite their solitude and the roughness of the few roads that led to them were, by comparison with our closely preserved streams of the south-west, heavily fished. Edinburgh, Berwick, and Newcastle contained anglers galore as they do to-day, though no doubt the great increase in population of the first and last-named has extended automatically to the fraternity, while the motor and the cycle, even with steep and awkward roads, must have made their mark.

But even forty odd years ago those truly Scottish institutions, the 'Fushin Clubs' of Edinburgh and elsewhere, often held their competitions on the best

and least accessible portions of the Whiteadder and its tributaries. A good deal of exaggeration, however, is indulged in regarding this increase of fishermen. Ten years before those here told of, that celebrated Scottish angler Stewart, whose range included the Whiteadder, wrote in his little classic that fishermen had so multiplied, the future of sport on the Border was most problematical. I think the fifties and sixties did witness a very great impetus to fishing, helped partly no doubt by railroad facilities. But at any rate in the seventies all these open waters were full of fish. As indicating the attitude then, and even still, of the lowland angler, Stewart regarded open rivers as a matter of course. I don't think he even discusses the closing of waters in his remarks on the future of fishing. That rivers could be depleted by fair fishing, which here includes the worm, never, I think, entered his head. Such a point of view rarely occurs to the typical lowland angler even to-day, and I believe in the main he is right. What change, if any, has taken place in these streams since the 'good old days' when I fished them as a youth, I don't feel qualified to say, interesting as such a comparison would and must be to any one concerned with the welfare of trout. But here is the local point of view, and apparently its results illustrated.

A few years ago, after some thirty-five of complete absence from this Border country, I found myself standing on a bridge over the Whiteadder in the Berwickshire low country. It was, in fact, my first day on Scottish soil and first sight of the Whiteadder since youth. My host and companion was a local land-

owner who had been one of our little fishing company in the old days. He had long ceased to be a fisherman, though the father of several. Nor were we at the moment concerned at all with such things, but were merely talking over old times and watching some trout rising under an over-arching willow, and something like this passed between us.

'All is of course changed now,' said I; 'and the river, no doubt, preserved up to its source?'

'Preserved? no; why should it be?' replied my friend in a tone of surprise.

'Do you mean to tell me, then, that with all the modern development and demand for trout fishing, things here are still as they were when we were young?' [I might add that a big village of a thousand souls lay in sight upon the ridge above, to say nothing of a paper-mill on the river employing about a hundred hands.]

'Yes, of course they are; what else do you expect? So far as I know, the river is practically free up to its source. Why not?'

Well, like any one else from south of the Tweed, at the beginning of the twentieth century I very naturally never expected anything of the kind. This was during a brief run of a couple of days across the Border. The following summer I revisited south-eastern Scotland seriously, and took the further opportunity of paying a longish visit to the upper Whiteadder, not wholly, since the month was August, on fishing bent, but with the prospect of at least throwing an occasional line on its once familiar streams.

I had not assuredly forgotten my old friend's utter-

ances. But twelve months perhaps had weakened their effect, and, moreover, he had himself long lost interest in fishing. So when in Edinburgh I turned into Hardy's (Mrs. Hogg, I found, had passed into oblivion) to get some flies, and still somewhat sceptical asked the manager if the waters of Whiteadder were still free, and if so, whether there were any trout left.

'Free?' said the blunt Scot, 'what else would they be, but for a trifle of water here and there in the policies? Any trout left! I killed sixteen pounds to my ain rod on the 21st of May last between Abbey and Ellemford. Aye, yon's a gran' wee river yet!'

If I suspected some licence of speech at the time, I soon came to understand that there was no ground whatever for such doubts. It was then, as I have said, August, and I did not expect to kill sixteen pounds or anything approaching it. But while up there we had one great rain. And when the flood had run off I took a day on the stretch above Abbey St. Bathans, so familiar to me in youth. A companion was with me, and together we nearly filled my basket, which held about fourteen pounds of this class of trout or grayling. We had nothing up to a pound, though there are plenty very much heavier than that in the river, but a goodly number of sizeable third- and half-pounders were among the lot, and as the interest of the matter lies in its being a heavily fished open river, not in our particular doings, it may be worth stating that we returned probably a hundred small fish to the water. I have fished the Whiteadder many times since then, but my own doings are of no immediate purport. It is more to the point here that

I have seen and heard at close quarters in the past few years a great deal of this Border fishing and realise what a world unto itself it is, how large the craft looms in the life of the country, and how different its conditions are to the comparatively exclusive atmosphere that pervades the trout streams even of Yorkshire, Wales, and the south-west.

Now, a trout-fishing club in the south means perhaps a dozen or so well-to-do gentlemen who rent a stretch of river and carefully preserve it, and probably nourish it periodically with fresh stock. A fishing club in Scotland represents a society of anglers, gentle or simple, citizens let us say of Edinburgh, which exists mainly for competitions, terminated not seldom by banquets of, in the old days at any rate, a most convivial character; for no men can dine together more joyously and altogether felicitously than Scotsmen. But as regards the Scottish fishing club, its main *raison d'être*, as I have before remarked, is competition and the winning of medals and other trophies, a custom not only alien but positively hateful in principle to the southern trout-fisher. But there it is 'whatever,' and the Scotsman likes it. There are scores of such clubs in the north, and on the day appointed for a competition by any one of them its members take the train, not generally, unless specified, for the same river for perhaps obvious reasons, but a choice is given of any *open* water. Away they then flit in singles, braces, or trios to various portions of a score of streams which custom has kept free, and that owners, even if they so desired, would probably find difficult to close. There is an old and strong popular tradition in southern

*Photo, A. P. Hope*

THE WHITEADDER AT HUTTON CASTLE

*Photo, A. P. Hope*

THE WHITEADDER NEAR ITS JUNCTION WITH TWEED

Scotland of a right of access to trouting waters. It may or may not be justifiable. It is, of course, not always recognised, but there it is anyway, and many rivers testify to the fact that they can stand usage without damage to the owners, and at the same time provide immense pleasure to a great number of worthy sportsmen. Some free waters, to be sure, are under 'associations,' but the term has not the usual southern significance of say half-a-crown or five shillings a day, but merely the payment of some such nominal amount per annum, the large number of subscribers thereby providing for the maintenance of a watcher. Almost the only potential enemies of trout are the miners, who repair in groups to these waters for two or three days at a time, sleeping in the open, and though keen enough rod fishermen they are not above making up for poor sport by nefarious practices. The local angler bears no jealousy whatever towards his fellow-sportsman, wherever he may hail from, but he loathes and suspects the miner, whether from Midlothian or from Lanarkshire, and probably with good cause.

When the competitors return at evening from Berwickshire, the Lothians, Selkirk, Roxburgh, or Peebles to the headquarters of their club, the baskets are weighed in, the victors are proclaimed, and the day sometimes, as related, wound up with a banquet. The results (not of the banquet) are published next morning in the *Scotsman*, along with the golfing, bowling, and cricket matches. Almost every day throughout the season their figures may be read; and any southerner, sceptical as to the capacity of the trout to hold his own and make good his losses,

can there find weekly, if not daily, proof of it, and account for what to him no doubt would appear an insoluble problem, as best he may.

Now, there is a delightful little stream, to wit, the Eye, that I used frequently to fish in youth. It twists in and out of the Great Northern main line for many miles, where the latter leaves the sea-coast of Berwickshire and dives through the skirts of Lammermuir on its way to the flat plain of Lothian and the Scottish capital. Every third person who goes to Scotland, otherwise almost every third person one knows, keeps close company with the little river for about a quarter of an hour. But I have never in my life met a southerner who ever took note of it, and mighty few who have ever so much as heard of the Lammermuirs, unless vaguely as the scene of a famous opera and a great novel. This, however, is purely by the way, and not concerned with the modest but beautiful little stream here alluded to. I was talking to a local sportsman on its banks only the other day as a fast train, loaded with Highland-bound tourists and sportsmen, roared by us towards Dunbar and Edinburgh, and expressing a hope that it was as good as it was in the days of yore.

'Oh, aye, it 's a gran' wee river yet; but maybe ye havena heerd we 've formed an association?'

'It 's no longer free water then,' said I.

'Well, it 's nae exactly free; we 've got the association, ye ken.'

'What is the subscription?'

'A shullin' a year, jest.'

'Is that enough to keep a watcher?'

'Na, we 've nae watcher; there 's nae need.'

'How do you spend the money, then?'

'Weel, in competeetions; first and second prizes, an' the like o' that: an' then we hae a dinner.'

This was at Grant's House station on the main line, where the little Eye comes singing out of the Lammermuirs to follow the railway southward, as related, for many miles. The village, including an inn vastly improved since I used to frequent it in times remote, is the nearest railroad point to the more beautiful and less fished upper waters of the Whiteadder. These can be reached in four miles by a hilly road, and in charge of the railroad crossing where it leaves the village there was recently, and may be still, for aught I know, a superannuated porter with a prodigious turn for eloquence and anecdote—a burly, round-faced hirsute being, with a tremendous far-carrying voice, a passion for fishing, and a deathless grievance against the company for putting him where he is, or was.

He wasn't everybody's friend. If you had shouted at him to hurry up with the gates, I doubt if he would ever have spoken to you again. Indeed, I don't think he was popular with the hill farmers, the dog-cart men—not for any official shortcomings, but for his passion for conversation. It so fell out that during a quite recent summer I was constantly going back and forth through his barrier, and being then mainly concerned with fishing, and furthermore possessed of a fatal weakness for roadside 'cracks' with originals of all sorts, I was practically annexed by this one, and seldom got away under ten minutes. He had

apparently fished every stream and burn within reach of the various ramifications of the North British railroad system on which he had spent his life. On each and all of them he had performed deeds of derring-do with fly and worm, to say nothing of the various grubs and beetles dear to the heart of the Border angler. The precise shade of a hackle for this river, the touch of gold tinsel beloved by the trout of that one—all such things as these, the garnered store of the hard-won leisure hours of an enthusiast, were the burden of his talk to willing, and I dare say to many unwilling, listeners. He had known many famous Border anglers, and was fond of recalling everything he had said to them and all that they had said to him on the unfailing topic. There was plenty of time, too, for such indulgence, as mighty few wheeled traps went through the gates to face the narrow, toilsome road across the hills beyond them. For myself I was generally cycling on these occasions, and as the ascent rose steeply from the crossing, one couldn't finish the business by mounting and riding away, but had to push for half a mile, which gave our eloquent friend a chance to keep abreast, and continue the record of his past triumphs and his present grievances for just so far as he dare wander from his post. He was always deeply interested, too, in the news from the Whiteadder, which river, poor soul, he never any longer got even a sight of. If the sport had been indifferent he would tell you the precise reason for it, and that he had never expected anything else. If, on the other hand, you had done well, he had all along been confident that such would be the case, and

had remarked to himself frequently throughout his passing hours and between the thunder of the lightning trains, 'It 's a' richt wi' the fushin'; the trouts 'ull be jes' takin' fine up yonder the day.' There was something pathetic about this stranded old angler and his crowded memories. The relation of them, however, together with his ever-abiding professional grievance, the nature of which I never could rightly grasp, must have helped to keep him from wearying in the passive sense, if not in the active one, as he proved something of a terror to the softer-hearted wayfarer.

Now, the Whiteadder rises high up on the northern brink of the Lammermuirs. From the top of the high heath-clad ridge, whence spout its infant springs, you look out over the noblest prospect in Scotland. Not the widest perhaps, nor assuredly from a superficial point of view the grandest, though in truth it is both wide and grand enough. But for its significance in things that matter, that stir the heart and quicken the pulse, there is nothing in the Highlands, the Scotland of the tourist and the hotel-keeper, the ghillie, and the sporting lessee that can approach it, for it covers the very heart of the northern kingdom which in the days of old so infinitely outweighed in all that signified its great half-civilised 'back country,' if the term is permissible. Below lie spread the rolling plains of Lothian, the finest farmed country in the world, melting away into the massed upstanding heights that mark the site of Edinburgh. And shimmering beyond is the whole length and breadth of the Firth of Forth, washing on its further shore from end to end the entire southern bounds of the ancient kingdom of Fife.

And far away behind Edinburgh and the Pentlands rise the dimmer outlines of the Ochils above Stirling, and fainter still, upon a clear day up on the northern horizon, the blue outlines of the Grampians may be plainly seen.

But the infant Whiteadder, gathering in the peat mosses at one's feet, turns its back upon all this storied country and heads away through the wild heart of these heath-clad hills for the Merse of Berwickshire, to fall eventually into the Tweed three miles above Berwick. It is the last of its tributaries, and the only purely Scottish river to end its course among English meadows. And if this appears for the moment an anachronism, it will be helpful and not amiss to remind the reader that Berwick town and some four miles of adjacent territory is English ground. Running down through mossy valleys, winding deep among rolling grouse moors, its solitude broken here and there by the homesteads of some vast sheep farms, and swollen by many tributaries, the Whiteadder quickly expands into a good-sized river. A dozen miles from its source, and while still far from the southern brink of the moors, you have to get into the water to compass it conveniently. So far there is practically not a bush upon the bank, and then comes rushing in the Monynut, a beautiful, semi-wooded burn amazingly full of small fish. Below the confluence the policies and hamlet of Abbey St. Bathans entwine themselves on either bank, a delightful oasis of foliage and sequestered habitations amid the great wild sweep of moor and sheep pasture. Here, chastened in spirit by a low weir, the clear amber-tinged waters in broad, quiet

current run down between the laird's lawns and woods on the one side and the mossy knowes clad with ferns and indigenous oaks upon the other. An ancient little kirk, a manse, and a few scattered cottages make up one of the most idyllic spots in the south of Scotland, in ancient days, as its name implies, a religious settlement of which scarce any trace is now left.

Though but four miles from Grant's House on the main line, it is virtually a *cul-de-sac* as regards roads, and is entirely shut off from the outer world—all, that is to say, but the world of wandering fishermen from both sides of the Border. And as there is almost nowhere nowadays for such wanderers to lay their heads on the upper Whiteadder, very few come up at the back-end of the season, and you may usually have as much water as you could wish for to yourself. From Abbey St. Bathans down to the flat, low country of Berwickshire, the river pursues a romantic and tempestuous course; chafing in deep-channelled rocky flumes between fern-draped walls and crags all beplumed with waving tufts of birch and rowan, or spreading out in wider streams and pools between the over-arching foliage of great forest trees. Above all these miles of stirring waters with their delightful blend of crag, heather, bracken, and woodland, Cockburn Law lifts its purple crown a thousand feet into the sky. Bird-life is everywhere astir. The grouse, the partridge, the pheasant are at close quarters here and in goodly numbers in brake and brae; cushats, sandpipers, water-ousels, moorhens, wagtails, pied and grey, revel in the lush abundance of everything their hearts most desire by land and water. Broad and deep, too, are some of

these swirling pools. Great trout of two, three, and four pounds, grown too wary for capture by any normal lure, swim in their depths and take heavy toll no doubt of the small trout and salmon fry. Some of us tried the sink-and-draw minnow on these presumed cannibals one afternoon, if only for the good of the river, dropping it through the foliage into deep water. Several times it was seized by one or other of them, but somehow or other, they always contrived when all seemed safe to avoid the final appeal and get rid of the bait without a serious scratch. Great numbers of bull-trout, too, rest here in autumn, though rarely taken on a rod at that season. It is in the spring, when you don't want them, that they take such a violent fancy to your fly.

My first experience of the Whiteadder in the dim days referred to earlier in this chapter, was almost wholly concerned with these lanky bull-trout kelts, strange beasts as they seemed to us at that callow period. And as to that cold winter in the early seventies, the frost had not long broken and the dust of March had only just begun to fly behind the harrows on the flat Lothian sea-coast, when the fishing fever following Devonian precedents developed its early spring symptoms. The climatic contrast between eastern Scotland and south-western England as regards the dawn of spring was a fact I had not yet grasped. The Lammermuirs, which to me looked exactly like Exmoor from a distance, and incidentally still more so when you got into them, seemed fairly to shout across the Lothian plain that the time had come to be up and doing. My youthful ardour, too,

had been whetted by vague but credible reports of fine trout streams such as I had suspected behind that long, dim barrier, all free to the angler. From some adventurous soul in our extremely agricultural neighbourhood, who had once made a far journey into the hills, I gathered that the Whiteadder was the principal river, and that a certain small inn upon its banks would provide sufficient accommodation. Referring to the map, I then found that the main line running south from our station to Berwick touched a point within seven miles of the aforesaid inn, namely, at the already mentioned station of Grant's House. There was apparently, however, no road to it for much of the way, nor is there now, and in any case no likelihood of getting a conveyance. In the meantime I had kindled the enthusiasm of an Irish companion of my own age who hailed from the foot of the Slieve Bloom mountains in the Queen's County, and as a fisherman was easily persuaded that he, too, felt those shadowy Lammermuirs calling to him that the trout were on the move. We had a third recruit for our voyage of discovery, an East Anglian of slightly more years, who had never even seen a trout and professed no desire to see one, but as an enthusiastic agriculturalist was consumed with meritorious curiosity to see what manner of a sheep country lay within these mysterious hills that day in and day out bounded our horizon from east to west. So, bearing knapsacks and fishing tackle, we dropped off the train on a cool March morning at the little station called after the man Grant, who in those days kept the only house near it, to wit, the inn. After due inquiry we headed for

our destination across the ridges of half-enclosed moorland—since then wholly enclosed—that opened on to the wilder Lammermuirs. It was still all very wintry, but I remembered Exmoor and my friend recalled the Slieve Bloom, and how the moorland trout in both were well on the go by now in open weather. The wind at any rate was in the west, if nothing else felt spring-like but the sunshine. We were half-way to Ellemford, our destination—upon the hill, in fact, that we had to descend to Abbey St. Bathans—when the Whiteadder burst suddenly into view beneath us. We were expecting a little moorland river, and here glittering below, broad and buoyant, for a full half-mile, was a noble stream indeed, a hundred feet wide if it was a foot. That moment abides with me yet. The Irishman and I waved our hats and shouted with delight. The sedate East Anglian, somewhat our senior, looked with more restrained approval on a sample of landscape that to him was a complete novelty.

So we dropped down into the valley by a steep, rocky brae, nowadays densely covered with plantations, and crossed the broad river by the same high suspension footbridge that I often cross to-day. The stream ran full and strong beneath us, of a clear amber colour, and in good condition. This, indeed, was something like a river! It was better even than Exmoor, I exclaimed in my joy, while my companion swore by all the saints of Erin that the Slieve Bloom streams could not compare with it, which was quite true, and I came to know them well enough in after years. He wrung me by the hand, and what a grip he had!

and blessed me then and there upon the swaying bridge. 'To think of it!' he cried; 'I've been a whole year down yonder without a notion that there was a trout within a hundred miles, and would have been another year but for you, and now look at this! Glory be to God!' We felt like successful explorers who had reached a longed-for but uncertain goal, I in the character of promoter and organiser, the Irishman as a half-doubting but loyal lieutenant. A friendship commenced upon that day which grew intimate beyond the common, and lasted till a quarter of a century later, when the speaker fired his last shot and threw his last fly in my company among his own Irish moors. We had still, however, three miles to travel up the river bank to our inn, our enthusiasm growing as each fresh pool or rocky run displayed itself to our eager gaze. And, indeed, even at this day, as I wander betimes, with or without a rod, up those three miles of unencumbered open water between Abbey and Ellemford, I feel ready at all times to make an oath that there is no finer-looking bit of trout water in the whole kingdom.

However that may be, we found our inn, which we came afterwards to know so well; a simple-enough little hostelry by the river bank, now long closed, but in those days not without some modest fame among anglers from Edinburgh to Newcastle. Nowadays both the bed and board it then afforded would be scouted by the average angler, but we weren't so fastidious in the early seventies. It was owned by a couple in delicate health, but managed by their sister, a rare specimen of the blunt, honest, ready-tongued,

capable Scottish spinster of those days, a great favourite with her generation of anglers, masterful as became a benignant despot, and always capable of giving a little better than she got in the way of chaff or banter. Her self-sacrificing nobility of character we none of us realised, and I only learned long after she was dead.

At this first acquaintance the little inn was surprised to see us, as well it may have been, but braced itself to the extent of ham and eggs, and the afternoon lay before us. The East Anglian started off to inspect the nearest sheep-farm, and we with trembling and eager hands rigged up our rods. We could have taken our time, for not a trout responded to our Irish and Devonshire flies, the local patterns not yet having been revealed to us. But it was not the flies that caused us half an hour or so of disappointment, but our own unseasonable appearance and the increasing cold of the day. Of a sudden, however, I heard a shout from the Irishman at the next corner pool, and noticed him waving his spare arm wildly, upon which I hastened to the scene, and found him running back and forth behind a heavy fish that had apparently taken possession of him. The bow of his tie had worked round to the back of his neck—a sure sign, I came to know afterwards, even to the very end of his life, that he was in a state of agitation. It was one of the salmon kind, quite obviously, that had shifted his neckgear this time, and in due course we got him safely out on a shelving beach, a three-pounder more or less, but to which of the salmon kind he belonged we had no notion. To shorten the story, we got six of these brutes between us that afternoon, and quite

enjoyed ourselves, though we never so much as saw a trout. When we got back to the inn, whose simple proprietors, curiously enough, were not at all fish-wise, we did learn that our fish were bull trout, which to our southern ears meant nothing at all. But being obviously of the salmon kind, it did occur to us rather late in the day that they must be kelts, and that it was illegal to kill them. The inn people didn't know anything about this. All they knew about fish was how to cook them, and that they understood to perfection. When we awoke next morning the whole country was under six inches of snow, and we began to realise how previous we had been in our eagerness after the trout, so there was nothing for it now but to go home. The innkeeper proposed to drive us to Duns, five miles off, in his spring cart, whence by a protracted railway journey we could get back to Drem.

By this time we had half convinced ourselves that the six big fish, weighing some fifteen pounds between them, were sufficient to bring us red-handed into the police courts. We were determined, however, having nothing else to show, to take them home, if only to save our faces against the gibes of our non-angling household, who had regarded our enterprise as a foolish sort of adventure. Such a display in such unsophisticated quarters would, on the other hand, be a great triumph. And it was now that the Irishman planned, and quite characteristically, what seemed, if our ideas were correct, a most gorgeous practical joke. Nothing had been said of the supposed illegality of our haul to the East Anglian. And in the characters our little company down in East Lothian chose to

attribute to its respective members he was pre-eminently its sedate and serious-minded one, a person proof against every folly of youth, even sport, but who looked on our enthusiasms with kindly toleration and philosophical good-humour, and with something of a twinkling eye. So it was arranged that our immaculate and unsuspecting friend should go home by dog-cart and train bearing in the most open fashion we could devise our, as we supposed, illegal haul. The price we were to pay for the enjoyment we expected to derive from our nefarious design was a twenty-mile walk home across country, which we professed the greatest desire for. And as we tramped across the snow-covered moors, and later along the muddy roads of East Lothian, we chuckled horribly at the notion of dear old D——, of all people in the world, being challenged, bantered, and even summonsed and led away to durance-vile for flourishing about in a market-town and two or three subsequent railway junctions with an armful of kelts. It seemed simply glorious, and infinitely solaced our long and weary way. Many were the conjectures as to his fate, or at any rate his adventures, as we drew near home, and saw the lights of our common domicile shining through the gloom. Deep, I fear, our disappointment when we found our would-be victim composedly smoking his pipe before the fire without a trace of past troubles or discomfort upon his benevolent face. The briefest inquiry satisfied us that nothing at all had happened, and the ugly fish were all hanging up safe in the larder, objects of admiration to the rest of the unsophisticated household. If our little joke

had missed fire for the excellent reason that bull-trout kelts, so far from being illegal booty, were then regarded as undesirables of which the river was well rid, we had at least the domestic triumph of a good basket of what passed, more or less, for salmon. The household ate them with apparent appreciation. The Irishman and I did not take any. We knew enough for that!

That was my first experience of the Whiteadder, but many and many a good day I had subsequently with my Irish friend, and others, and we must have taken many a hundred trout out of it between us in various visits in the course of the two or three following years. It was open fishing, as it mostly is to-day, and a good deal fished even then by anglers from Edinburgh, Newcastle, and elsewhere, and sometimes even as now the scene of fishing-club competitions. Whether there were more trout in this quite remarkable river in those remote days than in these, who shall say? Everybody of course says there were. But after all it is extremely few people who can speak out of their own experience, and even then one knows the temptation to belaud the past. I have been amused betimes to hear a younger generation refer to the Whiteadder in their father's day as if it was stiff with trout which would rise at your hat. The trout did nothing of the kind, and, moreover, had daily opportunities of distinguishing between the artificial and the natural insect. A south countryman would have called the river very heavily fished in the early seventies. I have myself seen eight rods upon it, between Ellemford and Abbey St. Bathans, for two or three consecutive

days in April and May, and this was, and is, in the more inaccessible and less fished half of the river. After an interval of half a lifetime my own experiences of recent years have only been at the back-end of the season, which is of small avail for comparisons with spring and early summer results in the long ago. But I have had ample opportunity to see that at any rate there is still a fine stock of trout, though such remarks are utterly superfluous when weighed-in baskets, as I have related, are published regularly in the daily press. Nay, more, if any more is wanted; for as I write these very lines the postman hands in a letter with the Berwick post-mark. It is from a friend up there and not concerned with fishing. But there is a brief PS. 'I went up to the Whiteadder yesterday, and got nine pounds.' Let the owner of a rapid river who thinks a rod over it every other day a bit of a strain take note and mark. For nine pounds is a very nice basket indeed, even in closely preserved water. But it is only what my correspondent expects to get in reasonable weather, and usually does get on this free water, and he can fish some of the best preserves in Northumberland if he choses. I wish the Fly Fishers' club would appoint a committee to examine and take evidence on the Whiteadder and its neighbouring streams. It would reveal a condition of things and possibilities that would astonish the average angler, and cause the normal owner and preserver of fast water, who was a kindly man and not a hopeless egotist, to think furiously. My old fishing companion of these early days and of many much later ones—the Irishman—was the most remarkable blend, in the sporting sense, that I ever

knew. He was recognised as the finest man to hounds in a whole community of hard riders. He was as sound a shot of the old-fashioned type as I ever saw, and a past master in an art of which the new-fashioned type knows nothing, that of handling dogs in the field. Extraordinarily keen as he was in both of these departments of sport, he was equally fond of trout-fishing. Indeed I have known few keener anglers from boyhood to the very end of his life, in spite of the fact that none of his local sporting friends and neighbours cared a button about it.

But here comes in the curious part of the business, in that he was the most indifferent fisherman, for a regular disciple, that is, that I ever knew. And trouting isn't after all quite like hunting and shooting or athletic diversions. Every one who is bred up to it and follows it consistently must arrive at a certain point of excellence. Up to that point it isn't so much a question of eye or hand or nerve or physique as of mere experience, though many of course pass this stage and are super-excellent, having some special gift, as we all of us know. But my old friend never reached the ordinary average of an habitual fisherman. It always seemed to me an unaccountable thing that a man with beautiful hands on a horse and an unerring aim at a snipe, a grouse, or a partridge should never have been able to acquire whatever it is that the normal angler of experience possesses. Most of my fishing companions through life have killed very much the same baskets as myself, while a few have done consistently better, which is in the natural order of things. But this most accomplished, ardent, and

thorough sportsman, who both in youth and middle age was my frequent and of all others most delightful companion by the riverside, had scarcely ever more than half my basket, and he always worked very hard. But where the mystery lay I really do not know, any more than I do not know why certain men always catch the most in any company. I have watched him again and again without being much the wiser. It was rather a sore point, I am sure, though in all the years he never uttered a single word upon the subject, and from some subconscious instinct neither did I, though we were very intimate. It never affected his unfailing cheerfulness by the water-side, though it was a frequent source of mortification to myself.

Moreover, he had two fairish trouting rivers, of which he owned some four miles, under his very windows. But he would often drive or even walk long distances to fish other and wilder streams from sheer love of the sport, and of a variety of scene and water; and I think some of these long April or May days by streams unknown to fame that I spent with him are among the most treasured of my angling memories. A mutual and breezy friend of ours, who was a super-excellent fisherman, but no respecter of susceptibilities, used to tell him he killed his fish by hitting them on the head with his fly and stunning them. He didn't like this, and indeed it was purely hyperbolic, for he threw quite a reasonable line, and had the eye of a hawk for everything with wings or legs. When I speak of our respective baskets, using the ego merely as representing the average fisherman, I am not quoting loosely from memory; for my

friend, if not unique in the curiously conflicting nature of his sporting endowments, was most assuredly so in one particular achievement of his life. I do not believe that another man ever lived who, from boyhood to the close of his life, which in this case ended at forty-six, kept a strict account of every single day's hunting, shooting, and fishing. And this, too, in the case of a modest stay-at-home Irish country gentleman, who followed all these pursuits assiduously—and above all hated writing! I regard this, for some years in my possession, as in its way the most curious document of the kind in existence—not for the information it contains, for it is merely a record of little more than bare figures—but it is all enclosed in a single fat manuscript book, the early pages of which were quite faded and yellow, while the last were still being written. What is more, on its title-page was the boyish scrawl with which so many of us at that callow period have commenced a diary of some sort with the best of intentions, that may have lasted six months! This one was entitled, 'J—— H—— T——, *His Sporting Diary*, 1865.' It began with hunting days on a pony, shooting exploits with a single barrel, and trouting in the home streams, and plodded on methodically without a break for thirty years, unclouded by a single spell of illness, and ending with a pathetic entry, because so utterly unconscious at the moment of writing of what it meant. '*Sept.* 20 [the opening day, then, of Irish partridge shooting]:—Shooting with B—— [myself]. Felt seedy; went home midday.' This was the last word, the end of everything, the sudden and early break-up of an apparently

iron constitution overtaxed, no doubt, by unceasing physical activities. As regards this concentrated record between two covers of a whole life's sport, the hunting being continuous, and including two years of acting M.F.H., naturally took up most space, namely, from one to three lines of small writing per day, giving the covers drawn or points of a run, and the horse ridden. For shooting, there is the beat shot, the companions, if any, the setters out, and the bag. For fishing, the stretch of water, the companion, if any, and precisely what each caught. That last is a curious note under the circumstances above related, and runs right through all the years, for the game bags, which would have usually told another story, are rarely thus apportioned.[1]

Often in the later years, when I was over in Ireland, the book, always kept locked up, used to be produced after dinner, and its author used to delight in reading out the rather faded notes of our youthful days together on the Lammermuirs, or in Ireland. There were no fish lies here! Just the precise number we each basketed, the water fished, the weather, and perhaps the flies used. But these bald entries stirred the chords of memory fast enough, and with pipes and hot punch before the blazing peat fire of the snug little smoking-room, we used to kill our fish all over again, and meet all our old friends and acquaintances of those days once more. And then came the

[1] The text as above might suggest an idle, useless life. As a matter of fact, a more unostentatiously useful existence in all matters connected with agriculture and county business would be difficult to imagine—above all, in Ireland. This indeed kept within limits the sporting days to be recorded.

solemn performance of recording the day just passed, if it was one for recording, and the owner of this extraordinary volume carried it to his standing desk, and pulled himself together with the portentously solemn expression that his humorous face always assumed when any writing had to be done. Then there was a brief silence, and the pen scratched away probably something like this, as it was generally shooting in those later days :—'Ballyragget bog and Dromanore. Self and B——. Dogs, Dash and Nell—16 partridges, 6 snipe, 1 hare, 2 grouse, 2 golden plover, 2 wood pigeons, 1 ptarmigan.' The last item, I may set down with a blush, was the local for pheasant, which when met with wild on the bog edge or mountain was not treated with ceremony after 20th September, even by a J.P., for excellent reasons not relevant here. And it must be remembered this was Ireland, not Norfolk. When the book was closed, and its owner in his grave under the Slieve Bloom mountains, it was sent to me, together, at my request, with a certain rather wobbly, top-heavy rod, and a time-worn game-bag. The book was returned not long ago, when a certain infant now sailing the seas in one of His Majesty's battleships reached something like man's estate. The wobbly rod and the tattered game-bag remain with me as cherished relics. For the race has run its course like so many in Ireland, so far as its old abiding place is concerned. Its extremely modest record no longer figures in the latest editions of Burke. The old ivy-clad house peeping down the beech avenue is, I believe, replaced or obscured by the vulgar erection of a political patriot who has prospered, like so many

of them, on retailing whisky and groceries, coupled with much profitable usury.

There was one particular entry which always gave us food for reminiscence. It ran—'*June 1st*, 1871:—Fished Dye. Self 32, B—— 44: two fish over a pound.' The Dye is a beautiful stream running down from the moors about Longformacus, and thence rippling over pasture lands to join the Whiteadder at Ellemford. It wasn't for the numbers, which, though rather flattering to the diarist, were not otherwise noteworthy. But we had traversed some thirty miles that day, otter-hunting down in the Merse of Berwickshire; and it was only after a belated meal at about four o'clock that we left our inn for the Dye, a mile distant. For some reason, I remember that afternoon with extraordinary clarity. I can almost smell it now—the fragrance of the gorse and quickening meadow grass, the odour of recently penned sheep, with faint whiffs of peat smoke from the cottages, all accentuated by a warm sun bursting out between plumping showers. The drake was up, and we caught, as the chronicle relates, some seventy and odd fish far above the average Whiteadder size, and were back at the inn by sunset, pretty well exhausted with so prodigious a day, which had begun at four in the morning.

Far up in the heart of the moors, beyond the famous sheep farms of Cranshaws, with its noble peel tower, and of Priestlaw with its sweeps of solitude, the Fasney water, a large troutful burn comes pouring down its peaty streams into the Whiteadder, and the two large burns uniting become at once a quite respectable river. There are a few large fish even thus high

up. It was some way above this, at a point where you can easily spring across the Whiteadder, that in youth I suffered the disappointment of all my days on this river, and lost the largest trout I ever fairly hooked in it. The water was on this occasion so low and clear that I had mounted a horse-hair cast, and a fish nearer two pounds than one was obviously outwitted by the quite unwonted article. When it felt the prick of the fly, however, it leaped clean out on to the low, rushy bank, and rashly, perhaps, thinking the fish would break me anyhow, I made an instant dash for it. But in its untaxed vigour it slipped through my fingers and was gone, fly and all. My stock of philosophy at twenty was not equal to the occasion. I sat down upon the bank and almost wept.

I don't think even now many anglers get up to the Fasney or the Whiteadder above their junction. It is a long, long way from anywhere, though a crow could fly to Edinburgh in thirty miles. But then an angling biped isn't a crow. Nowadays he is not often an enthusiastic pedestrian, and the narrow road that edges along the hillsides to the source of the Whiteadder is of a primitive description and not well adapted to any of his mechanical aids to travel. Nor again is bed and board to be had nowadays within the Lammermuirs. The few inhabitants are, I believe, discouraged, if not prohibited, from affording it, for obvious reasons. It is a fine wild country where the infant Whiteadder and the brawling Fasney join their waters, though in a sense so near to the heart of things. It is much more lonely than the heart of Exmoor or Dartmoor nowadays, to make a comparison so many

can appreciate. There is not a tourist in the whole country, not a human being on the whole wide waste but a stray shepherd. The curlews call, the drubbing pewits make unceasing clamour, the grouse cluck, the burns murmur, and the black-faced sheep bleat, and in August for miles and miles the hills are aglow with the purple flare of their thick coat of heather. A line of butts here and there upon a ridge outlined against the sky are a modern innovation and a rather inharmonious note upon the wild. But the stock of grouse has, I believe, doubled and trebled since I first knew the country when burning was but irregularly practised and a small company of guns followed their dogs through such a tangle of heather as nature laid before them. Little strips of the Whiteadder, from its source to its mouth, usually in the policies (*anglice* private grounds or park), are kept as private water. And even the Lowland Scottish angling public, that has views fundamentally different from its English equivalent on these matters, regards such sanctuaries without disfavour. The same spider flies, with slight variation, are used on the Whiteadder as were in vogue forty years ago and were so much associated with Stewart's then redoubtable name. Red hackles, black hackles with orange body, snipe hackle with purple body, and two or three other spider varieties probably account for a majority of all the fish killed in the river and its tributaries.

Scotsmen are strong conservatives in the matter of fishing as they are in so many other things not immediately connected with a general election. And indeed, as to that, any Scottish tory will tell you that

the strength of the opposition he has to encounter lies not so much in the hankering after new and strange things but in the stubborn adherence to old party lines that arose from conditions which have long passed away, and of which the average modern voter knows nothing at all. You will see rods in use that have long vanished, and with good reason, from English river-sides. There may still be seen here the wobbly eleven- or twelve-footer, heavy for one hand yet hardly demanding two, that recall one's boyhood, when the ethics of rod-making were in a torpid condition and a hardy superstition still held the field, which fitted a rod to a stream by a sort of geometrical process almost as you might measure a man for a suit of clothes. That some of these unhandy implements should be still wielded by blacksmiths or rural dominies or postmen of the older generation would be nothing, but you frequently see them in the hands of a young and different type of angler, who has obviously none of these reasons for adhering to a weapon that has nothing to recommend it.

The south countryman is apt to go to the opposite extreme and to fuss about technicalities in rods and the pattern of flies before he has acquired a reasonable knowledge of how to use either. The tyro is bewildered, and no wonder, by the printed fly-lore of some famous expert, not being able to read into it a due sense of proportion. And then daunted at the seeming prospect of having to graduate in the abstruse science of entomology before he can hope to become a fisherman he hails with relief the advertisement of a new patent fly. It is not like anything in the heavens

above or on the waters beneath, nor made of materials hitherto familiar to fly dressers, but perhaps for that very reason irresistible to the jaded appetites of the most fastidious trout. So at least say the testimonials with undoubtedly bona-fide signatures. Our young friend, though he is not always young, is inclined to begin at the wrong end. If he would cease to worry himself and wait till he gets down to the district of his choice, and there secure from the more or less local tackle-maker the patterns which the local expert swears by, they will be at least quite good enough for him. I ought, I suppose, to blush in confessing the fact that they have always been quite good enough for me. It is unenterprising, no doubt, but I admit to having always been something of a slave to local prejudices and rather a good customer to the man on the spot, or at any rate to the man who provides those on the spot with such patterns as they demand of him. This, too, involves the confession that I have tied no flies myself since almost boyhood. Life has always seemed too short. For those dozen or more years, when early habits are confirmed, it was impossible, and both the habits and the impulse proved afterwards irrecoverable. I have consoled myself with the plausible and common excuse that my samples would probably be less effective than those of the professional fly-tier. Still I admit that this has never quite satisfied me even when I think of so many really first-class wet-fly fishermen who have never made a fly in their lives.

As to that redundancy of equipment with which the embryo angler is apt to burden both his fly-book and his mind, it is a form in miniature of the lavishness

characteristic of Englishmen, and always noticeable to the alien eye, since the first alien recorded his impressions of us. The Englishman who can afford it, and sometimes when he cannot, loves an outfit—a trousseau. All the world over, whether as settler in a new country or as a mere traveller, he is notorious for the superfluity of impedimenta he drags around with him. The anxiety to provide against every emergency, possible and impossible, with just a touch of the national thriftlessness in spending, or what seems so to most other races, shows itself even in such a trifle as the tyro's congested fly-book or box. It is an 'outfit' automatically inevitable in his eyes, and an Englishman or an English-woman, as I have said, dearly loves a trousseau. The percentage of wastage in the outfits of English men and women of all kinds in the last two centuries probably runs into millions.

Except that the flies used are smaller, I do not think the taste in patterns, with the strong proclivity for spiders, has altered much on the Scottish border. Certainly the Whiteadder expert kills wonderful baskets under the circumstances of his much-fished-for trout with a very limited selection. Stewart, fifty years ago, who, the reader may be again reminded, was accounted the best trout fisherman on the Border, which assuredly meant the best fisherman in Scotland, considered that some half a dozen patterns were sufficient for any one. He and Mr. Francis Frances, then fishing editor of the *Field*, and author of a work that was the delight of my boyhood, had much wordy warfare on the subject. Neither had much conception of the other's environment, circumstances, and tradi-

tions, and it was a quite futile though entertaining duel, so far as the echoes of it, which lasted into my time, come back to me. Perhaps the incident stuck in my mind because, at a period when one's experience was inevitably limited, I had met the northern champion on the river bank, while his south country opponent about the same time had given me my first encouragement at literary effort, a thing one never forgets.

The Blackadder, like the Whiteadder and many other fine streams unknown to the outer world, rises in the Lammermuirs, but for most of its course it plashes through the fertile lowlands of Berwickshire. Though smaller than its sister river, it provides some thirty miles of trouting, over some two-thirds of which the public, in the shape of many scores of anglers, exercise a perennial privilege which apparently has no serious effect upon its stock of trout. I have never fished the Blackadder, though I know much of it well as a passer-by. It has but a moderate share, however, of the romance and charm of its bigger sister. The true rival of the Whiteadder upon the eastern march in this respect, as indeed in fishing qualities, and more renowned in song and story, is the Leader, which, rising at the western end of the Lammermuirs, runs down through Lauderdale to join the Tweed near Melrose. There are plenty of men in Lauderdale who maintain that their river is even better than the Whiteadder. Personally I do not agree with them, but it is assuredly a most beautiful stream, and I have fished over much of it. It presents the same insoluble problem—nay, an even greater

one—as to why there should be any trout left in its waters, or at any rate in those major portions of them which are open to the public on payment, in this case, to be precise, of half-a-crown per annum. To be literal, for there are two associations, you can fish about two-thirds of the Leader and all the burns, one or two of which yield on their day fat baskets, for five shillings a year! This modest contribution, by providing watchers, practically ensures the river against the insidious wiles of the miners from Lanarkshire and Midlothian, concerning whom the fishermen of the Whiteadder, who are not thus protected, cherish grave suspicions.

But the Leader, winsome and delightful stream that it is, is much shorter than the other. Nor, like the Whiteadder, does it wander for miles in the wilderness comparatively aloof from the haunts of men. It comes into being quite suddenly where several burns break out of the Lammermuirs at the foot of the Soutra pass, and this is actually the head of Lauderdale. One of the great main roads from the south to Edinburgh follows the river from its junction with the Tweed near Melrose to its head, and then climbing by zigzags the above-named formidable pass crosses this narrow western bit of the Lammermuirs, and there, confronted by a most noble prospect, drops quickly down into Midlothian. Thousands of motors now annually thread this beautiful and peaceful vale, with its wide, level pastures and spacious homesteads. The swelling flanks of the Lammermuirs roll from height to height upon either side, and through the green levels the crystal waters of the Leader sparkle

in sinuous course from rocky pool to gravelly shallow, between open grassy banks. Some miles lower down it leaves the wide, open pasture-land, and frets and flashes in a deep rocky trough between high wooded hills for practically the rest of its career. The Leader is not only celebrated in Scottish song, but it is quite a classic stream among Scottish anglers. I had heard its praises chanted by them in my youth over their toddy beside the peat fire at Ellemford and elsewhere again and again; so when I made its acquaintance for the first time a few years back, its double claims to touch the fancy asserted themselves and stirred pleasantly within me.

> And is this Yarrow, this the stream
> My waking fancy cherished?

I am sure I quoted this and in the proper spirit as I came down from the Lammermuirs on the eastward by 'auld Maitland's tower' one bright summer afternoon, and saw the Leader glittering like a silver thread amid its green haughs below. And if Leader is not Yarrow, every one not wholly ignorant of Scottish minstrelsy knows very well the poetic connection between the two. Rivers have assuredly a strong personality, and no wonder, for they are live and animate things, not mute, like hills or buildings. All fishermen know they stir the memories associated with them more effectively than any other things labelled as inanimate. And little rivers, beautiful rivers, if they have things to say, whether of great deeds or merely of memories treasured only by yourself, have a subtle eloquence that no man-made melodies

can equal. The Leader, for its size and length, is rich indeed in suggestion for those who have ears to hear, though it was not precisely of the drum and trumpet I was musing when gently thrilled by my first sight of it, or I should not have been moved to Wordsworthian quotation.

Once more, and with apologies for such reiteration, I really do not know why there are any trout at all in the Leader. Its very classic qualities as a trout stream should be dead against such a survival. It is rural and pastoral and Arcadian enough to be sure. But there are two little towns astride of its short course, and pretty nearly every man and boy in both, I have no doubt, knows how to fish, with a worm at any rate; while Edinburgh itself is only some twenty odd miles from the head of the dale. I spent nearly the whole of one recent September there in the ancient little borough of Lauder, which is the capital of the upper and open part of Lauderdale, as Earlston is the metropolis of its lower, pent-in, and woody portions. I did not go there in the main for fishing, as the month selected may perhaps sufficiently indicate, but I did a good deal incidentally, and in one way and another covered most of the water which has moved so many generations of Border fishermen and singers to convivial or poetic invocation. This alone would have interested me not a little, and as those three weeks were about as hopeless from a fishing point of view as the mind of angler could imagine, it was just as well there were other consolations on the abounding interests of the neighbourhood.

For centuries the Maitlands and the Lauders were

rivals for supremacy in the dale. It is nearly two since the latter succumbed as regards Lauderdale, and the former as its titular earls have held the field in the great old rambling mansion of Thirlestane beside Lauder. Here in a mile of woody policies the trout of Leader have a refuge which no doubt helps to maintain a sufficient stock in the much tormented reaches of the river above and below. Yet in all that glittering east-windy September I only met a couple of stray fishermen on the river in either portion! I was out myself seven or eight days or parts of days with poor results, which last was the fault of the weather, not of the river, as I saw quite enough to realise that there were plenty of trout in it. I ought to have had a decent basket one day, and suffered on that occasion some partly deserved humiliation at the hands of one of the above-mentioned anglers.

Wishful to explore the lower portion of the water, where pent in between the steep woody heights of Chapel and Ledgerwood it pursues a picturesquely fretting course, I went down there in rather lazy mood as regards the fishing part of the business. As the wind was blowing briskly down stream, the otherwise poor prospects didn't move me to struggle up against it, particularly as my chief object was to get down the river and sample it. So I whipped lazily downwards with such very moderate prospects as the clear low water, just here and there, held out to so slack a procedure. Rather to my surprise I picked up some half-dozen quite sizeable fish, while the woodland scenery was delightful and the class of water so alluring as to make me long to fish it seriously, when a

reasonable supply was coming down and the wind in another quarter. I had grown so accustomed to having the river to myself that I was quite startled, while reeling up a nice third-of-a-pounder, to see the point of a rod emerging from the bushes at foot of the pool. It proved to be one of the long wobbly ones still extant on Border trout streams. Its owner, however, who was soon at my side, was unmistakably a gentleman. This was about noon, and he had fourteen or fifteen very nice fish in his basket. As an habitué of the river, though quite obviously preserved waters would have been readily accessible to him, he felt bound to say something consolatory on the subject of my meagre basket. This was done by way of a polite suggestion that fishing up stream in this particular water was the most profitable method, the 'particular water' being no doubt inserted to let me down gently and nicely, since it was perfectly obvious that fishing down stream on such a day proclaimed the neophyte upon the housetop. I lamely endeavoured to mitigate the situation by explaining my rather detached motives; but as the fish had suddenly taken it into their heads that morning to rise pretty well, this was not so easy. My gentle, but I am sure unconvinced, critic told me that on a good day in April or May he always looked for eight to ten pounds weight of fish in this water, and furthermore that the size of the fish had increased of late on the Leader, and that a great many pounders and over had been killed on the fly in the course of the past year.

My other encounter on the Leader was much more entertaining. The day was rather more promising of

aspect, though, as it proved, deceptively so, and about noon, having successfully outwitted a half-pound fish that was rising in an overhung pool beneath the old Lauder peel tower of Whitslade, I espied an angler, in this case, too, indisputably a gentleman, with two attendants coming rapidly up stream in the water. I sat down and waited for him in anticipation of those friendly interchanges of current experiences and such-like that are customary on the river bank. He was thrashing away, too, at a great rate and in the apparently careless fashion of a man who has done his serious work and is going back to catch a train or trap, for which on this particular day there seemed ample reason. 'What is the matter with the fish?' he called out the moment he got within speaking distance.

I said that I didn't know, but that I had been out since ten and had only half a dozen.

'I have been out since eight,' he replied, 'and have only seven.' So I thought we were going to have a comfortable chat, particularly as I was a stranger and on the look out for tips. Not a bit of it. This enthusiast went down into the water again just above me and flogged away for his very life. He had a man on the bank with a landing-net as well as another attendant, who proved to be the river watcher, for soon after he caught me up to crave a sight of my ticket.

'Who is that gentleman?' I inquired.

'Why, yon's Maister B——,' replied the man in a tone almost of reproof.

'And who is Mr. B——? I suppose he wants to catch the two o'clock train at Lauder.'

'Maister B——! I thocht ye'd hae kent who he waur. He 's won the gold medal of the —— club in Edinborrie twice rinnin', an' if he wins it the day he keeps it for his ain.'

'He 's not running for the train then.' The watcher thought this a great joke, though it wasn't intended for one, and laughed quite immoderately for a Berwickshire man.

'Na! na! he 'll nae be awa' frae the river afore nicht, an' he 's the only member on the Leader too the day.'

'Where are the others?'

He mentioned several other streams within forty miles of Edinburgh, over which they were presumably distributed. After another half-hour, inspired by the superhuman energies of the gold medallist, which proved things to be getting worse instead of better, I reeled up and went home, devoutly thankful I was not in for a piscatorial Derby and my reputation committed to a breathless ten-hour fight against untoward conditions.

Next day in Lauder I met the man who was carrying the landing-net for the Edinburgh champion, and naturally put the inevitable query. The north-east wind and the waning glitter of the day, it seems, had defied all the efforts of even so great an artist, and I learned that only a single fish was the reward of a whole afternoon's labour. But my informant turned out to be the local champion, and according to his own account had arranged a private match with this hero from the metropolis to which he looked forward himself with the utmost confidence. He told me he had

killed sixteen-pound baskets on two occasions in the preceding June, and had never had so many fish of over a pound in all his experience of the river as in the past season. Truly these are miraculous streams! The Leader, to be sure, has some advantage over the other Tweed tributaries, as none of the salmon tribe run up it.

Lauder is the most old-fashioned little town I know in Scotland. With its one long, wide street it is positively picturesque, an adjective one may well be chary of applying to a Scottish country town. It is, moreover, fast asleep, which sounds a still hardier form of description in this practical and generally wide-awake country. The northward-bound motors in a fairly steady stream take it, as it were, in their stride and leave it quite unmoved, and for their part are probably quite oblivious even of the name of the place they cover with their ceaseless dust. Doubtless there is a speed limit through the town, but I never saw a motor show any sign that such a thing existed. Nor is there any practical reason why it should, as there is seldom anything in the street. Till lately Lauder was six miles from a railroad, and its people did a flourishing livery business in driving one another to the Fountainhall station across the moors. That is now scotched, and the defunct industry is still fondly recalled as marking a prosperous era for ever gone. The railway killed it, the railway of six miles which the train, cork-screwing through winding moorland glens, takes forty minutes to accomplish, though this includes a stoppage or two in which the guard gets down to open a gate, a quite precious incident I never

remember to have encountered in any other railway journey. In spite of this, however, the tradesmen complain that the inhabitants go to Edinburgh for their shopping! Indeed, I doubt if you could buy many things in Lauder. In pre-railroad days I expect the inhabitants led the simple life. It is related of one of the earliest female passengers by rail to Edinburgh that on beholding the sea for the first time, at the moment foam-flecked by a brisk breeze, she exclaimed, 'My certie, yon 's a bonnie flock o' sheep!" But if the retail trade of Lauder is sorely harassed by this lightning connection twice a day with the main line, you can at any rate buy flies, the right sort for the Leader, of course, and they don't hold altogether with the simple spider patterns of the Whiteadder. As I have already hinted, the Lauder anglers don't think so much of the Whiteadder; probably they don't often fish it, or know much about it. Everybody in Lauder has lots of time to spare. It isn't in the least like other Scottish or northern townlets, and most of the natives love a crack. There are two respectable little hotels and other harbourages for visitors from the outer world. A few score of such from Edinburgh, with a taste for the simple life or for angling, repair thither in the holiday season, and there is a great deal of forgathering with patriotic and reminiscent natives. A more delectable spot and a more delightful neighbourhood for such a purpose would be hard to find within easy reach. There are other accessories in Lauder, too, besides the river and the old peel towers and the many prehistoric camps that crown the summits of the overlooking Lammer-

muir hills. For every morning at six o'clock or thereabouts your slumbers may be abruptly shattered by a horn vigorously blown in the wide, silent street: and if you look out of your window you will see twenty or thirty cows hastening from back-yards and byres to meet the town herd who pilots them to the hills. At sunset you will see them returning, and to the sound of the same civic horn scattering to their respective milk-pails. For the freemen of Lauder own nearly two thousand acres, half of which is pasture and half excellent tillage land, which last is divided among them according to ancient rites far too intricate to deal with here. Lauder is only a townlet of some fifteen hundred souls, but it is a great thing to be one of its hereditary freemen, the privilege being appraised at about five hundred pounds, to say nothing of the glory. This, no doubt, keeps its patriotic folk from fretting that they are not as other bustling places, like Galashiels for instance, just across the hills, or even as other market towns like Melrose, Kelso, Duns, or Haddington. It tends, no doubt, to making them historically minded, contented with their quiet lot, and ready to crack at all times about the Earls of Lauderdale still beneficently reigning over them and those long departed; or even about the long vanished Lauders whose ruined peel towers still dot the dale. Æsthetically it is just the place for the contemplative angler, and I have made no mention of several lusty burns that may be followed into the heart of the hills by those who have a mind for such rambles, and are content with small deer and an off-chance of something better. You mustn't, of course, play about on Sunday

as in the wicked south, and in the still worse playgrounds of the denationalised Highlands; for this is Scotland proper, real, typical, sturdy old Scotland, not a portion of the Gaelic fringe leased out to Englishmen, Americans, and Israelites. Practically no southerner or alien ever treads this quiet street or throws a fly in these waters, or even shoots the grouse upon the hills.

If you go to church on Sunday, at the Old Parish Kirk you will find it well packed with men as well as women, who as vocalists leave nothing in the way of fervour to be desired. You will hear an admirable sermon, too, from a minister who is not only a theologian, but as a naturalist and antiquarian and essayist has illuminated the wild heart of the Lammermuirs to the great delectation of Edinburgh and Scottish readers generally. As you are borne out of church with the full flowing tide of worshippers, you are pretty sure to meet the other tide pouring down the wide street from the opposition place of worship—that of the United Free Church. This is the moment when Lauder looks really animated and lively, for it is a thoroughly church-going place. Moreover, it is no longer incumbent upon a Scotsman to dissemble his feelings on emerging from the kirk. He may now show that he is cheerful and happy, and freely exercise those social instincts that for no occult reason seem common to all congregations on their escape into the open air.

The Lauder burgesses used to ride their bounds on the king's birthday, finish up with a horse-race down the street, drink the king's health in front of the

town hall, and then like good Scotsmen toast one another till the small hours of the morning. This ancient usage is no longer associated with such convivial ceremonies. They are all good boys here now, or nearly all. Even the toddy ladles and the rummers, within easy memory in daily use throughout southern Scotland, are now exhibited in glass cases as family heirlooms, and gazed at by a generation of tea drinkers as mysterious implements used by their ancestors for some purpose or purposes unknown. Of the quality of stuff that steamed habitually in these stemm'd tumblers the younger folk in their moderate lapses from the temperance regime cannot even guess. What has become of it? After forty years I can taste its flavour still. Where has it gone? I wonder how Christopher North and the Ettrick Shepherd would feel after the traditional 'ten tumblers' of the modern tavern sample!

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